The Truth About Wagner

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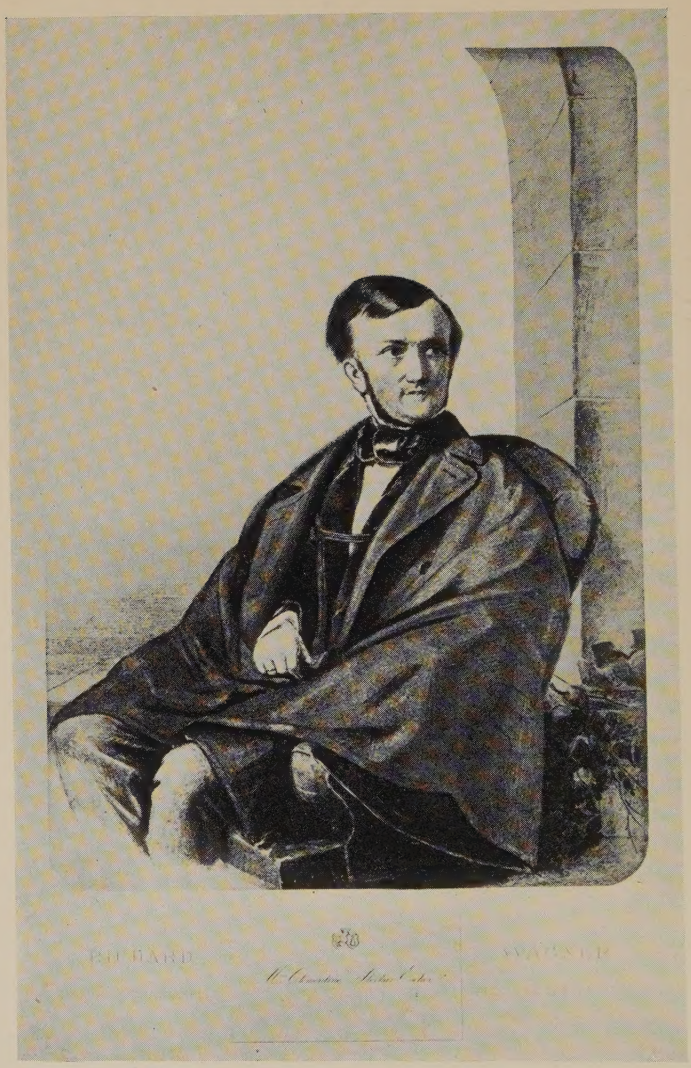
THE TRUTH ABOUT WAGNER



Charles Lavell Photo

RICHARD WAGNER IN 1853

THE TRUTH ABOUT WAGNER

BY
PHILIP DUTTON HURN
AND
WAVERLEY LEWIS ROOT

WITH ELEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS
IN BLACK AND WHITE

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THE TRUTH ABOUT WAGNER

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT WAGNER LIE

IF there is one man who has attracted as much attention from critics, commentators, biographers and writers of all categories as William Shakespeare, that man must be Richard Wagner. The literature that has accumulated about his fascinating figure forms a monument almost as great as that devoted to the Elizabethan. It is a good hour's work simply to read through the titles of the works on Wagner in the British Museum. It would be the task of a lifetime to study adequately the complete library on Wagner at Eisenach.

A great part of the literature on Shakespeare has been devoted to controversy; the same is true of that about Wagner. In Shakespeare's case the question was whether or not the actor, William Shakespeare, was actually the man who wrote the plays to which his name was

attached. The controversy in Wagner's case seemed to centre about the question as to whether or not he actually wrote the letters and documents attributed to him in the form in which they have been published; and, if he did so, whether he was a trustworthy witness.

The play-going public, of course, cares little whether Shakespeare or Bacon or the man in the moon wrote Shakespeare's plays so long as it may have the pleasure of seeing them. The musical public can afford to put aside all thought of the Wagner controversy when it listens to his music, which is sufficient to itself and requires no critical gloss. But they who have interested themselves in the life of this extraordinary man, a man of involved and many-sided character, must have asked themselves many times where the truth lay. Was Wagner the almost inhumanly perfect character painted by one group of biographers, maligned by envious enemies? Or was he, as the opposite faction seemed to think, little short of diabolic—a vicious man whose faults had been concealed by those whose interest it was to maintain a fairer picture of him?

To throw new light on this confused question might seem a difficult matter. The very

mass of what has already been published should have precluded the possibility of any fresh view. The diligence of the search for original documents must have left only a few scattered letters to reward later seekers after evidence. Nor are we confronted here with the necessity for accepting facts at second hand. Wagner was himself a prolific writer, and a fierce controversialist. He answered enemies and critics with a vitriolic pen, he furnished hundreds of articles to different papers, sometimes paying to have them inserted, either to defend his theories or to attack his opponents. He wrote long letters to his friends, giving minute details of his daily life. More than three thousand of them have already been published. How then, can we discover anything new about Wagner?

That is what the layman asks. The student of the genius of Bayreuth knows better. In spite of the tremendous mass of material on Wagner, we have very little accurate information about the longest, the most important part of his life—the years he spent with his first wife, Minna Wagner, the years which saw the writing of practically all of his great works, the unhappy, turbulent years, unhappy because of his great love for that wife. In all the

works dealing with Wagner those years are in darkness. Commentators have forgotten that they were the years of his greatest productivity. They have forgotten that his passion for Minna flared into outbursts that even the modern orchestra is hardly equipped to cope with. They remember only the later, more barren years of his life. They remember the days he spent with Cosima Wagner, his second wife—the barren days when the great man's mind flared feebly, when the magic fire of the Nibelungs no longer burst forth from his brain in golden outpourings of sound.

There is a fascinating story behind the veil thrown over the most productive period in Wagner's life. It is the story of the battle of a living woman against a dead one to secure a place in fame that the second had won and the first coveted. It is the story of the struggle of a jealous woman against an unselfish one. It is the story of the successful fight of Cosima Wagner to take her place in history beside her great husband at the expense of Minna Wagner. Successful, that is, up to now. The new documents open up a new vista; the life of Wagner and Minna as illumined by letters that passed between them. The attempt of Cosima

Wagner to obtain possession of these letters is exposed; and, in addition, we have the stories of Wagner's other love affairs and the attitude of Minna, who unselfishly sacrificed her happiness for the welfare of her famous husband, and made it possible for him to maintain the unsurpassed creative effort that waned after he left her.

There is a second thrilling story in the uncovering of this evidence. That story is now being told for the first time. It was hinted at in the press of every civilized country in the world on the morning of May 19, 1929, when the discovery of the documents which form the basis of this book became known. But there were many facts that could not be revealed at that time. The name of the collector who brought together that material was withheld. The manner in which she obtained it, the sensational source from which it came, remained secret. That story may now be told.

Go back in fancy to the closing years of Wagner's life. He is living with his second wife, Cosima Wagner. He is completely under her influence. He is fêted, a hero, a king, a demigod; he has his own mammoth organization for the production of his operas as he

wants them produced. He is happy—happier, no doubt, than he was with Minna. That, perhaps, explains his later unproductivity. Genius often works best under the stimulus of pain. But there is one source of sadness. He realizes that his unhappiness with Minna was caused by his love for her, a love that exaggerated their minor differences and magnified them into causes for misery. Cosima feels this. She grows to hate her husband's first wife. She determines that her memory shall be stamped out, that the official story of Wagner's life shall place Cosima, not Minna, at his side.

To this end she uses her tremendous power over her husband. His great mind is overruled by the strength of his wife's will. Cosima bends every effort to collect all the scattered bits of Wagner's correspondence, especially to gain possession of all the letters he wrote during his life with Minna. She makes Wagner help. He himself writes to persons who possess valuable material, demanding the return of papers that would contradict the picture Cosima is building up for the delectation of future generations. She desires to draw into her safe keeping all the documents pertaining to her great husband, in order to issue official histories,

official view-points of his life in a manner which, as we shall see later, arouses suspicion of suppressions, withholdings, alterations, even complete falsifications.

While Cosima was combing Europe for every scrap of Wagner material, the Hon. Mrs. Burrell, an admirer of the great musician, also set out to collect original documents with the purpose of issuing an accurate and complete biography of the great musician. Mrs. Burrell was a member of an old English family. She was the wife of the Hon. Willoughby Burrell, who, after her death in 1898, became Lord Gwydyr. Her father was Regius Professor of Medicine at Trinity College, Dublin.

What she succeeded in bringing together, the Burrell Collection, is the basis for this story. It is a remarkable collection. The most remarkable thing about it is that she succeeded in making it in the face of competition from Cosima. Remarkable, also, is the fact that after her death in 1898, her heirs failed to realize the value of the collection. For thirty-one years it gathered dust in Victorian jewel-boxes hidden away in a safe deposit vault, while other priceless manuscripts mouldered in the bottom of clothes-hampers. Some

pieces, known to have been in the collection, were lost and are still being sought.

When Mrs. Burrell started her search it was difficult work indeed. Europe seemed to have been denuded of Wagner material; it had flowed from all quarters to the hands of Cosima. But she persevered. Occasional stray letters or small sets wandered into auction rooms, to be snapped up at once by Mrs. Burrell. But for many years she found it difficult to get hold of manuscripts of any genuine biographical value.

Then, one day, she was told of an old lady who owned a piano that had once belonged to Wagner. She learned this while travelling in Germany on her never-ceasing hunt, and she learned, moreover, that this old lady lived at Eisnig, in Saxony. To Eisnig Mrs. Burrell went at once, only to run up against a wall of suspicion that she failed to understand. She persisted in her inquiries for information about Wagner, or about any manuscripts or letters he might have left behind him. Finally, her obvious admiration for the great master, and the evident sincerity of her desire to write an accurate biography of him won over the old lady. She revealed who she was. She was Natalie.

How many who know the story of Wagner's

life remember the name of Natalie? Not many, it would be safe to say. Natalie was the illegitimate daughter of Minna Wagner. Fate had delivered into Mrs. Burrell's hands the one person who could give her the evidence which might otherwise have been lost for ever, which might have left enthroned as the truth the false history propagated by Cosima; fate had brought her face to face with the one person who had a powerful motive for opposing the schemes of Cosima. That motive was the desire to protect the memory of her mother.

Because of the intensity of his feeling for Minna, Wagner accepted her illegitimate child as a member of his household. In the year 1836, when Wagner was twenty-four and Minna was twenty-seven, the two were married. Natalie was nine. She was explained as the younger sister of Minna. She lived with her mother and stepfather during practically all the time that the two were together. No other person alive knew more about the private life of the composer of *Tristan* and his first wife.

When Minna died she left all her possessions to Natalie. Impoverished, deserted by Wagner, she had nothing to leave but docu-

ments and papers. She could have left no richer legacy. She was a careful and systematic woman, and she had not only saved all the letters and papers connected with important events that had passed in the Wagner household, but had also preserved many souvenirs, such as the receipt for her wedding-ring and an invitation from royalty to her husband—all valuable to the biographer.

Natalie was poor. She was dependent on Wagner. Cosima had already started to build up the Bayreuth tradition—the tradition of which the integral implication was that Cosima was the most important woman in Richard Wagner's life—and he had been prompted to take part in that effort. Under Cosima's influence he wrote to Natalie, demanding all the letters he had written to Minna. That letter is in the Burrell Collection. Despite her perilous position, a pensioner on the bounty of a careless, self-centred, impetuous man, Natalie was reluctant. She was unwilling to surrender the letters, knowing that they contained proofs of his devotion for his first wife that were hardly safe in Cosima's hands. Wagner wrote again, in a tone perilously like a threat. This letter too is in the Burrell Collection. Natalie

acquiesced. She returned between 250 and 300 letters; *but she retained one-third of her mother's legacy*, among them the most important letters of all, those for which Cosima's fingers were fairly itching—*Wagner's most intimate love-letters to his first wife.*

What happened to those letters that Natalie gave up fully justified her suspicions. They were published but published under mysterious circumstances that gave no clue to their origin, and edited in such a way as to indicate that unidentified editors had done their best to distort the impression given by the letters by alterations of which their readers were not informed.

So Natalie clung grimly to the rest of the documents. She was left in abject poverty, yet retained in her possession valuable papers that she did not dare sell for fear that the memory of her mother might suffer. Many veiled attempts were made by agents of Cosima, representing themselves as coming from other sources, to obtain her documents. Each time she unmasked the trick and held on to the precious letters, swearing to herself that this young girl (Cosima was more than a score of years Wagner's junior), who had usurped her mother's place in the affections of her husband,

should never take her mother's place in history.

Even when her suspicions of Mrs. Burrell, in whom she saw at first but another emissary of the hated Cosima, were calmed, she remained cautious. She sold a few copies of some of the letters, saying that the originals were not in her possession. Finally she was entirely won over. She produced the originals, parted with priceless musical manuscripts, and wrote out in her own hand an account of all the main incidents in Wagner's life with Minna. Almost all the material in her possession was bought by Mrs. Burrell, piece by piece, during her lifetime. After the death of his wife, the Hon. Willoughby Burrell bought the rest of Natalie's collection when the latter died. This is the great mass of the Burrell Collection. Practically every event of the Minna period of Wagner's life was illuminated by it. This portion of the great composer's existence, so long and so deliberately obscured, is now open to the inspection of students and admirers of Wagner.

The catalogue of the Burrell Collection recently printed, but not yet issued to the public, contains ninety-nine printed pages. This long list of documents is made up almost entirely of

unpublished material, of important pieces once believed lost and now brought to light.

The note-book for *Tannhäuser* is included in the collection. It contains Wagner's first sketch of the opera, a letter to a friend describing his idea, and 130 pages of the short score. Another important item is the text of the libretto of *Lohengrin* as sent to Weimar in 1850, for the printing of the book, with full stage directions for its production. There is the prose outline of *Rienzi*, the text of the libretto, in both rough and fair copies, a translation into French by Wagner himself, and a musical manuscript in the shape of a short score, covering 163 folio pages.

Many of the musical relics are curiosities of great value. Of *The Fairies* (*Die Feen*), Wagner's first complete opera, written when he was only twenty years old, there are a prose outline, two different versions of its famous aria, with both words and music, and the complete orchestral score of the aria, covering twenty pages. Senta's famous ballade from the *Flying Dutchman* provides another twenty pages of full orchestration in manuscript. Wagner's first published work, written at the age of eighteen, the *Overture in D Minor*, is

among the manuscripts. So are three considerable sections of his second opera *Forbidden Love* (*Das Liebesverbot*), written at the age of twenty-one; his first sonata, Opus I, *Sonata in B Minor*, written at the age of eighteen, which covers twenty pages; and a number of small pieces dating from about 1871, under the title of "Kraft Liedchen." A particularly valuable find is the complete manuscript of Wagner's recasting of Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis*—three hundred pages of manuscript, of which about fifty represent additions by Wagner to the original score.

Among the discoveries is the score of a complete opera, a rewriting of Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis*. It is entirely recast. Of its three hundred pages, about fifty represent entirely new material by Wagner. It is, in effect, a Wagnerian work. It is practically unknown to the average opera goer, for it has received only a few scattered performances at Bayreuth since the original productions in Dresden, for which Wagner refurbished it—performances which perhaps might have been more authentic if the present manuscript had not disappeared.

The musical finds are of great importance; but they have not the human and biographical

interest of the literary relics contained in the newly discovered collection. There is a rich treasure trove, for Wagner was a voluminous writer. He was a writer before he was a composer. He liked to write, he entered into controversies with critics, he was a regular firebrand in the press, tearing and slashing, provoking retorts and answering them. His turbulent outpouring of opinions fills page after page of private letters. Their number was swelled, moreover, by the fact that when he was a political exile, in rebellion against the tyrannical Saxon government, he remained in close touch with all his friends from abroad, keeping up a heavy correspondence.

More than three thousand Wagner letters have been published, all of which labour under the suspicion of editorial tampering, suppression, and alteration, yet the most important of Wagner's letters remain in the Burrell Collection, for it was precisely their importance that led Natalie to keep them when she was forced to give up the rest.

"Leubald," a poetic tragedy written at the age of fifteen, never published and always believed lost, is first in order of time among the manuscripts. It emphasizes Wagner's start as

a literary artist rather than as a musician. Very important from a collector's point of view is "Mein Leben," Wagner's Autobiography, of which only fifteen copies were privately printed, between 1870 and 1874. It is the only copy known to exist, and with it is his letter to the printer giving directions concerning its production.

Among the more than five hundred unpublished letters from and to himself and his first wife is one from Jessie Laussot, one of Wagner's lovers, about whom much information, to be set forth later on, is gleaned from the Burrell Collection. How Minna tolerated Wagner's escapades even though she suffered from them is indicated in two ways; that she endured Wagner's illicit love affair is shown by the fact that the letter from Jessie is addressed to Minna herself; that she suffered, secretly, one sees by the words written across the letter in Minna's hand—"False, devastating creature!"

Then there are the 150 letters to Minna which include all Richard's love-letters to his first wife. These letters alone would suffice to tumble the Bayreuth tradition ignominiously to the ground. Fifty personal letters to Wagner's greatest friend, E. B. Kietz, add another source

of unpublished information to the understanding of Wagner's real attitude towards his first wife.

But the most startling find of all is the famous "lost letter." Biographer after biographer has bewailed the disappearance of this letter, which is blamed for causing the final break between Wagner and Minna. This is its history.

Mathilde Wesendonck was the inspiration of *Tristan and Isolde*—or at least Wagner thought so. When he finished the music for the first act of this most passionate of all operas, he wrote an eight-page letter which he intended to send to Mathilde with the manuscript. Minna intercepted it and read it. Long-suffering as she had been, the contents of that letter were too much for her. Her love for Wagner flared into the hot flame of anger. She rushed to the Wesendonck house and made a scene. As a result, Wagner fled from his home and went to Venice. This was in August, 1858, twenty-two years after their marriage.

It was the beginning of the end. Minna's heart trouble grew worse from that day. From 1864 onwards Wagner lived with Cosima,

daughter of the great virtuoso-composer, Franz Liszt, and wife of the noted conductor, Hans von Bülow, who gave up his wife to Wagner because he believed the master's genius so great that he was above all morality. Minna died of heart disease in 1866, and her death haunted Wagner for the rest of his life. Cosima was divorced about two years later, and Wagner married her in 1870.

The irregular position of Cosima must have been most uncomfortable for her. Those who attacked Wagner made no bones about dragging the illegitimacy of his relations with Cosima into the conflict. Cosima and her friends were spurred on by the snarling and barking of his enemies, after her marriage, to justify her conduct by blackening the character of Minna, by representing Cosima as having saved Wagner from his first wife. This desire to rehabilitate herself, as well as her jealousy towards the woman whose death had thrown a pall over her husband's life, formed her motives for the persecution of the memory of a dead woman.

But Wagner's first break with Minna was not caused by Cosima. At the beginning, it was not the younger woman replacing the older one; the first break, with its later result—the second

marriage of Wagner at the age of fifty-seven—was the sequel of the famous "lost letter" to Mathilde Wesendonck. That letter is now found and the true story of the love of Richard Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck may be revealed.

There are other valuable relics in the collection. There are rare photographs, portraits and mementoes. There is the original of the famous water-colour portrait which has always been the world's favourite picture of Wagner. There is a large oil painting of Minna, never reproduced, showing her as a most attractive and charming young woman. It was one of Natalie's prized possessions, and in the frame, under glass, is a lock of the hair against which Wagner's lips were so often pressed. Finally, there is a rare photograph of Natalie herself.

An odd addition to the collection is a naïve diary written by Suzanne Weinert, employed, in 1875-76, by Cosima as governess at Wahnfried. It gives a day-by-day account of life in the Wagner household, written in a style that might have been attributed to Daisy Ashford.

Several manuscripts missing from the collection may still be found. It is known that it once included the scores of "At Weber's

Grave," "Rule Britannia Overture," and the unfinished opera *The Wedding* (*Die Hochzeit*). Likewise a copy of the book of the *Ring,* presented to Schopenhauer, is missing. Since the publication of the catalogue a missing group of letters, written to Minna by one of Wagner's sisters, has been found.

Lost for thirty-one years, the Burrell Collection, so briefly described above, gives us at last the true story of the turbulent life of Wagner and of his love for Minna Wagner, Jessie Laussot, Mathilde Wesendonck and Cosima von Bülow. That story we may now begin to read.

CHAPTER II

"I AM THE SON OF LUDWIG GEYER!"

"I AM the son of Ludwig Geyer!"

These words, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, opened the manuscript of "Mein Leben," the privately printed Autobiography of Wagner, of which only fifteen copies were made—all of which have disappeared except the single one in the Burrell Collection. In this opening sentence Wagner denied the legitimacy of his paternity.

Yet, when the official edition of his Autobiography was issued in 1911, nearly half a century after it was written, it began with the statement that Richard Wagner was the son of Friedrich Wagner.

Does the original edition of "My Life" differ in any other respect from the authorized edition published under the direction of Cosima Wagner fifty years later? Does the single copy in the Burrell Collection give the lie to the official biography?

The answer is still partly unknown. A careful line by line comparison of "My Life" with

the authorized version of 1911 must be made before the variations can be listed; but a cursory inspection of the original gives the impression that the authorized version is only slightly altered. Yet there is one important difference. The original edition carries Wagner's life only up to the year 1861—that is to say, before the beginning of his life with Cosima. The authorized version *adds five years more to the tale.* There is no indication in the authorized version that those last five years were *added* to the original Autobiography or that they were written by another hand than Wagner's. There is no explanation whatsoever of this divergence from the original version. Who wrote the story of those last years? Was it Cosima?

If Cosima Wagner is responsible for changes in her husband's Autobiography, why was she touchy on the subject of his paternity? If Richard Wagner himself was willing to bear the stigma of illegitimacy, why should Cosima have objected? The answer is simple. Cosima had become tender on that point because of the many insults levelled through her at her husband, during his numberless fierce controversies. She was his most vulnerable spot. Sieg-

fried and Eva were born before Cosima's marriage to Wagner. Isolde was born while Cosima was still with von Bülow, and both men claimed to be her father. It seems unlikely that Cosima would have named her child Isolde at a time when *Tristan and Isolde* was being produced unless she had desired to acknowledge, in the name of the child, the identity of the parent; unlikely again that she would have given point to that action by naming Wagner's undisputed son Siegfried. The first name was affirmation of Wagner's parenthood; the second, confirmation. Finally, Cosima herself was the natural daughter of Franz Liszt and the Countess Marie d'Agoult, though her father had later legitimized her birth. She had every reason to be touchy on the subject of legitimacy.

Moreover, Cosima always desired to demonstrate that Minna was unworthy of Wagner. Minna's reputation might suffer from the knowledge that Natalie, known throughout Minna's lifetime as her younger sister, was really her illegitimate daughter. That fact, concealed for forty years, even from Natalie herself, became mysteriously known after her death. How? Who knew it except—the

Wagners? Wagner, who never forgot his first wife, may have been opposed to revealing her secret during her lifetime. But after her death he no longer objected, and, indeed, in the Autobiography, upbraided her for what he terms her cruelty in keeping from Natalie the knowledge of her birth. If Cosima Wagner desired to discredit Minna by allowing the secret of Natalie's birth to leak out, in order to prove her unworthy of Wagner, it would certainly not help her case to admit that Wagner was himself illegitimate.

To readers who are now sitting in judgment on the appeal of the case of Minna *v.* Cosima Wagner, who are now hearing the evidence for the rehabilitation of Minna Wagner, this is an important point. If the Autobiography of Wagner was changed, if it was not printed as he originally intended that it should be printed, if Cosima provided the pressure that caused that change, she must have had a motive for doing so. She *had* a motive for this first change.

And if that change was made even before the first privately printed edition came out, is that so astonishing? Cosima exercised a tremendous influence over her husband. It was to her that the Autobiography was dictated.

She was still suffering from the sting of the insults she had undergone, she was still flushed with the triumph of her capture of Wagner from Minna. It was at the very inception of the Autobiography that she made it into a document that has been branded as untrustworthy by subsequent biographers—perhaps the first time that the Autobiography of a man of Wagner's eminence has been accused of falsity. Vanity, misunderstanding, misinterpretation, perhaps, but falsification—never.

What are the facts, then, regarding Wagner's paternity? That he habitually referred to Ludwig Geyer as his father is unimportant. Friedrich Wagner died six months after Richard's birth. Richard never knew him. He was brought up in a family of which Geyer was the head. At school he bore the name of Geyer. His works might have gone down to posterity under that name if his sisters, the daughters of Friedrich Wagner, had not begun to win sufficient successes on the stage to make the name a valuable one. Wagner never missed an opportunity to acquire an asset for himself. He was in many ways extremely practical. He adopted the name of Wagner.

So the fact that he looked upon Geyer as his

father, that he always referred to him as his father, proves nothing. He would hardly have taken any other attitude. The likelihood that Geyer really was his father is to be found in other evidence.

Ludwig Geyer was an actor, a friend of Friedrich Wagner, who introduced him into the Wagner household. At that time, it must be remembered, Friedrich Wagner was forty-one years old and Johanna, his wife, only twenty-nine. Geyer entered the household in 1812. Richard Wagner was born on May 22, 1813. Friedrich Wagner died on November 22, 1813. Nine months afterward, at the earliest possible moment permitted by the law of that time, Ludwig Geyer married Wagner's mother and a child was born *six months later*, on February 26, 1815.

Certainly, then, Geyer had found his way into Johanna Wagner's heart within six months of the death of her husband. Perhaps he had done so earlier.

What does Wagner's Autobiography say about Geyer? Its account is open to the classic criticism—it "doth protest too much." The action of Geyer in marrying his friend's widow is so heavily overlaid with whitewash that one

cannot help feeling that some ugly fact is hidden underneath.

Friedrich Wagner's "great fondness for the theatre," says the Autobiography:

> was further shown by his choice of the actor, Ludwig Geyer, as one of his intimate friends. Though the choice of this friend was no doubt mainly due to his love for the theatre, he at the same time introduced into his family the noblest of benefactors; for this modest artist, prompted by a warm interest in the lot of his friend's large family, so unexpectedly left destitute, devoted the remainder of his life to making strenuous efforts to maintain and educate the orphans. Even when the police official (Friedrich Wagner) was spending his evenings at the theatre, the worthy actor generally filled his place in the family circle, and it seems had frequently to appease my mother, who, rightly or wrongly, complained of the frivolity of her husband.
>
> How deeply the homeless artist, hard pressed by life and tossed to and fro, longed to feel himself at home in a sympathetic family circle, was proved by the fact that a year after his friend's death he married his widow, and from that time forward became

a most loving father to the seven children that had been left behind.

So carefully is this passage worded that it may give Ludwig Geyer an appearance of almost superhuman virtue, so excellently is it designed to dissipate in advance an anticipated attack, even to the careful falsifying of the date of the marriage by three months in order to exceed the bare legal limit (although Wagner elsewhere is exceedingly scrupulous about dates), that one might be excused for thinking, on its evidence alone, that Herr Geyer took far too "warm an interest in his friend's family" and filled Friedrich Wagner's "place in the family circle" only too well. No doubt he felt "at home" there, having had the pleasure of "appeasing" Johanna for her husband's frivolity. It would be interesting to hear a psychoanalyst's report on this passage.

That is what the Autobiography tells us about Geyer. Its omissions are as important as its admissions. Here is what is omitted:

In spite of the careful dating of the various episodes, there is no dating of the time when Geyer entered the Wagner household. There is, indeed, no admission that Geyer was more

than an occasional visitor. One might read the Autobiography carefully without ever realizing that Geyer had the opportunity of being Wagner's father.

Again, there seems to be a use of the words "father" and "stepfather" carefully designed to impress the casual reader with the idea that Wagner was several years old when Friedrich Wagner died. Both words are applied to Geyer, but when his death is described, at an age when Richard was old enough to play the piano to him, the term "father" is used. There was no point in trying to mislead Wagnerian students. But a casual reader would inevitably have gained the impression that Geyer appeared on the scene shortly before the death of Wagner's father, and that the boy was then about six, particularly as the propinquity of the death scene to the passage just quoted above gives the impression that the death of Friedrich Wagner is being described. The deception seems too elaborately worked out to be accidental.

And now for the evidence of Nietzsche. To him Wagner had sent the manuscript and proofs of his Autobiography to be read and corrected, for the Wagners had succeeded in converting the great philosopher (who was

thirty-four years younger than the composer) into a sort of glorified errand boy. It was, then, in the original manuscript that Nietzsche saw the famous line which, he afterwards asserted, read, "I am the son of Ludwig Geyer." Only three other persons ever saw that manuscript—Richard, Cosima and the printer, Bonfantini, who was chosen for the work precisely because he was an Italian and did not read German.

It was planned that Nietzsche, after making the corrections, should send the manuscript directly to the printer. But perhaps his quickness in seizing upon the paternity statement decided the Wagners that they were indiscreet in admitting a third person to their secrets. The manuscript was recalled, Nietzsche corrected no more proofs, and Cosima prepared the final version. Probably she was the only person who could have persuaded the always obstinate Wagner to swerve from his desire to print the Autobiography just as he had at first written it, for he had expressed that intention to Nietzsche in the letter that accompanied the manuscript. "The chief thing is," he wrote, "that the manuscript shall be given to the printers exactly as it is."

The evidence that the crucial sentence once appeared in the Autobiography does not rest solely on Nietzsche's word, for he at once took action to corroborate what he had seen, and undoubtedly drew Cosima's attention to the undesirability of letting him see more.

A fervent worshipper of Wagner, Nietzsche proposed to send him for Christmas a large photograph of Schopenhauer, whom Wagner admired, in a carved frame. On reading Wagner's confession of his paternity, Nietzsche at once decided to have carved as crest on the frame a vulture (in German, *geier*), and carried on some correspondence with Wagner on the subject. A letter from Wagner, in which he asks that the vulture be so carved as not to be mistaken for an eagle, was preserved, and is evidence that Wagner did not object to Nietzsche's proposal. There is no record in their correspondence of any correction of a possible misunderstanding on the subject of his birth.

The manuscript of the Autobiography remained in Nietzsche's possession *seven months*, as we learn from the dates of letters in the Burrell Collection. He had, therefore, ample time to be sure that he had made no mistake about the opening sentence of the Autobiography.

This is a point that has not hitherto been known, and those who have disputed Nietzsche's authority have usually assumed that the philosopher misunderstood some phrase of which he had only a fleeting glimpse. It has also been assumed that Nietzsche saw only the *proofs*, and might have been misled by a typographical error; but what he had in his possession for more than half a year was the original manuscript. He could have made no mistake.

One other fact corroborates his statement. Wagner evidently consented under pressure to withdraw the definite statement of his illegitimate paternity. But his obstinate nature insisted on some sort of satisfaction. He gained it by leaving a subtle hint in the form of the vulture crest on the title page of the original edition of the Autobiography. That crest will be sought for in vain in the authorized edition of the Autobiography, but the unique copy in the Burrell Collection bears upon its title page the figure of a vulture—*Geier*.

The Burrell Collection contains, in addition to the copy of "My Life" (which was bought from the widow of the printer, who had secretly kept a copy for himself) some correspondence concerning its printing, obtained

from the same source. Included in it are several large envelopes of the size then used for proofs. Undoubtedly they contained the original proofs of the book, with the offending sentence, if Nietzsche read correctly, deleted. But the contents of those envelopes have disappeared. So, except for the presentation of the evidence above, we must say with William Wallace, who discusses Wagner's paternity in his biography of the composer: "No more can be made of the matter until that firm grip in Wahnfried is relaxed." There are many matters that were considered closed until that firm grip (which means, of course, Cosima's) should be relaxed, and the original documents which she has gathered and concealed should come to light—if, indeed, those documents have been permitted to exist; but some of them are now cleared up by matter in the Burrell Collection, and others may be, before the long task of cataloguing and translating the mass of material is finished.

Among the number of unpublished letters in the Burrell Collection written by Wagner to the printer, Bonfantini, one, dated July 5, 1870, is of particular interest. In it Wagner outlines clearly his purpose in having fifteen copies of

"Mein Leben" printed. That work was not to be published for many years—not, that is, though Wagner naturally does not put it that way, until the witnesses to the incidents detailed in it should be dead and unable to testify to its accuracy or lack of it—and the composer feared the loss of the manuscript. So the copies were to be made and placed in the hands of friends who could be trusted not to contradict the Bayreuth tradition, then in its infancy.

Was it the intention to destroy these copies later, when their purpose should have been served? If so, has that intention been carried out? An authoritative statement in the Berlin *Vossische Zeitung* for May 26, 1929, said that those copies were destroyed in 1911, *before* the publication of the authorized edition of the Autobiography.

The Jews have always eagerly clung to the thesis that Wagner was the son of Geyer, who was said to be a Jew; and in that case he would be one more genius to add to the already notable group bred by their race.

So much for the birth of Wagner. It has always been veiled in mystery, and for the present it must continue to remain so.

As regards the rest of Wagner's youth, the

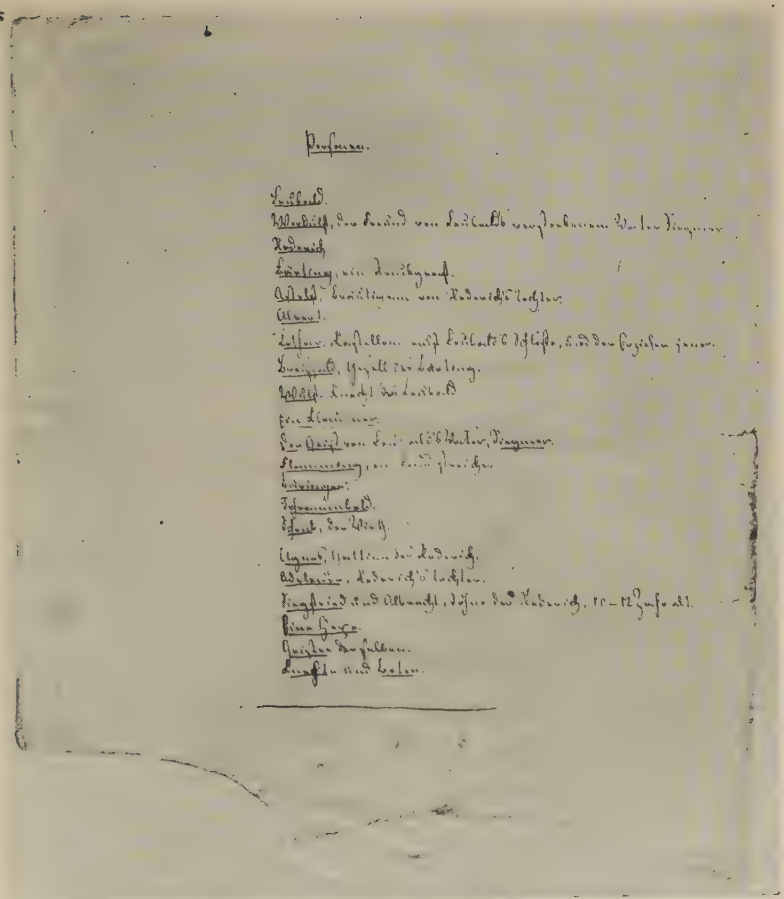
accepted account is in the main correct. Until he met Minna Planer, there was little to which Cosima could take exception. But though the material on Wagner's earlier years turned up by Mrs. Burrell is less sensational than that with which we shall deal later, there are still a few interesting sidelights.

At the age of fifteen, Wagner was a student at the St. Nicholas' School of Leipzig. There he wrote a poetic drama entitled "Leubald und Adelaide." "The manuscript of this drama," he said in his autobiography, "has unfortunately been lost"; and perhaps it was for that reason that he dared to speak of this work of his distant student days as "a great tragedy." But the manuscript was not lost. Minna had saved it; and when she died it passed to her daughter, Natalie, and from her to the Burrell Collection. For spending his time in composing this early work, the boy got into trouble with his teachers and his family. And it seems probable that they were right. A mixture of "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Macbeth," and Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen," the plot breathes of blood and sudden death. It is filled with ghosts, murders, deeds of violence, kidnappings, battles, and finally violent love for

the last surviving member of the family Leubald has sworn to exterminate. Driven to insanity, he is besieged by the ghosts of his gory past, seeks freedom from them through sorcery, then kills the impotent sorcerer who, with his dying breath, calls upon the evil spirits to assist the ghosts in rendering Leubald thoroughly insane. The assault of the whole horde of the powers of darkness is too much. Leubald kills his beloved Adelaide and dies himself.

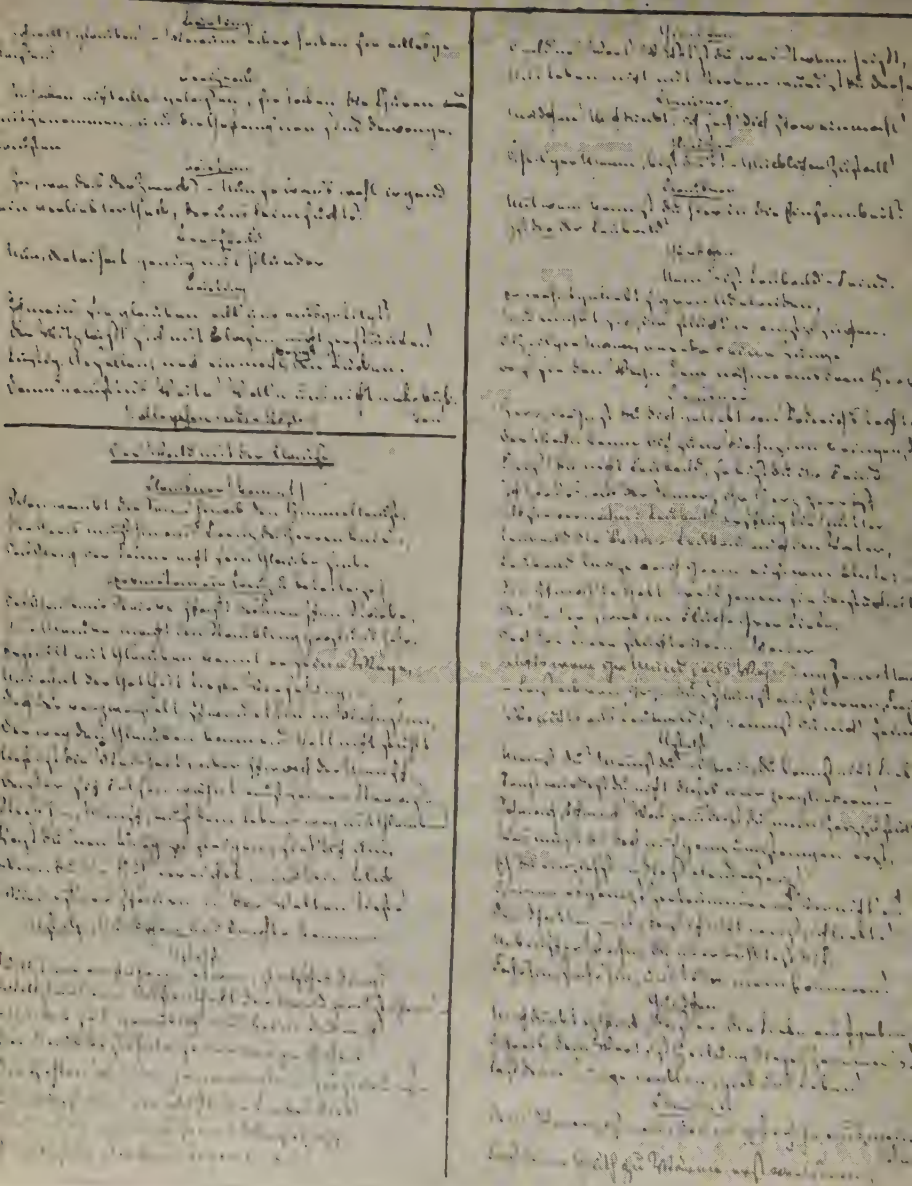
This adolescent work might move us to laughter to-day. But its importance to Wagner students cannot be denied. The light it throws upon the mental development of Wagner is considerable. It forecasts Wagner's method of preparing his operas, story first and music later. It emphasizes the precocity of his genius, and it shows him early as the literary artist as well as the musician. His exuberant imagination was not yet sufficiently under control to produce an integral plot, and he was unable to resist the temptation to put too much into a single story. The elements of many of his operas are to be found in "Leubald."

Another point is of importance in connexion with this rediscovered work. It marked the beginning of the music-dramatist in Wagner.



Charles Lavell Photo

LEUBALD, LIST OF CHARACTERS, SHOWING CORNERS TORN OFF BY ANGRY SCHOOL TEACHER



Lavell Photo

A PAGE FROM *LEUBALD*

He decided that the unfavorable reception of "Leubald" by his family was due to the fact that it required music to mask the extravagances of the plot; and for some time he intended to provide music for it.

"Leubald" shows, also, the early development of the beautiful and graceful script which distinguished Wagner's writings. His musical manuscripts were equally beautiful to look at. The first opera he started, *The Wedding* (*Die Hochzeit*), once in the Burrell Collection, has disappeared and is still being sought. Its plot is described by Wagner in his Autobiography.

Still more interesting is *The Fairies*, the first opera which Wagner finished and produced. The later Wagner scores have long been available. Gorgeously bound in vast and glittering volumes, the scores of the *Ring* are to be seen at Eisenach, Munich and Bayreuth. So is the complete score of *The Fairies*. But it is a final score. In the Burrell Collection one may see how Wagner went to work to compose his operas. The preliminary steps are revealed. We discover that from the first Wagner knew how to write operas. There is no gradual development of his method. With his first opera, *The Fairies*, he adopted the five stage

scheme that he followed for the rest of his life. First came the prose outline, then the libretto, then the most interesting sections of the opera which he finished first before fitting the rest of the music around them, then the short score and finally the complete orchestral score. Wagner called these five stages "*Entwurf*," "*Gedicht*," "*Bestandtheile*," "*Compositions Skizsen*" and "*Partitur*" respectively.

A little of Wagner's history is necessary to bring us up to the production of *The Fairies*. After his student days, which he seems to want to make us think in the Autobiography was a bold and slashing era, though his challenges to the duels which German students took pride in fighting never led to any actual encounters, he succeeded in having some of his earlier works performed. Wagner was never backward in pushing himself, and never hesitated to ask the right people to help him. That may account for his luck in having more works performed than a young and unknown musician could expect. His *Concert Overture in B Flat* was performed at the Court Theatre, Leipzig, in December, 1830. The orchestra grumbled about the oddness of the music and the audience laughed. Wagner became used to laughter

later, though he never failed to lash out at those who laughed, but he must have found this beginning painful. His next few compositions were for the piano.

His two concert overtures in D minor and C were performed in 1831. The former was played again at the Gewandhaus, in Leipzig, and the programme, preserved in the Burrell Collection, is the earliest known on which his name appears. Other programmes show that it was performed again in the same year at a concert given by Matilda Palazassi (had he begun at nineteen to persuade women to take his part?) and that his *Symphony in C* was performed at Dresden in 1833 and later at Leipzig. This was a marvellous record for a youth of twenty.

Cosima's contention, then, that Wagner's greatness began with his life with her fails to hold water. It was at that period that he began to reap the full reward of his genius; but that genius, as we have seen, showed itself very early, and Cosima deserves no credit for its flowering. What is more, Wagner showed himself quite capable of helping himself—always, it is true, by discovering who could best help him and by asking them, with no hesita-

tion whatsoever, to espouse his cause. His cleverness at pushing himself and pulling strings, at achieving results which a more modest but equally gifted composer would not have arrived at, account for his early success in having his works played. It accounts also for the positions which he soon found for himself.

Richard's brother, Albert, happened to be connected with the opera at Wurzburg. We have no evidence save Wagner's habit of using his relatives to the utmost that it was through Albert that he was invited to conduct one of his overtures there, but we know that Albert secured for his brother the post of chorus-master at the local theatre, which was vacant at the time. In lasted three months, but short as it was, it gave Wagner a previous experience to point to when seeking his next post. *The Wedding* had been abandoned and *The Fairies* finished before that next post came. *The Fairies* was distinguished by the same exuberant unbridled imagination, the same love of the spectacular and the supernatural, as "Leubald." The fairies and magicians of the piece numbered among their "props" a gulf of fire, which circumstance, taken together with other uses of

fire by Wagner, moved William Wallace to inquire if Wagner were not, perhaps, a theoretical pyromaniac. Finding it difficult to get *The Fairies* performed, he wrote *Forbidden Love* (*Das Liebesverbot*), founding the plot on one of Shakespeare's crudest comedies, *Measure for Measure*, and filling it full of a rich libertinism that involved him in his first difficulties with censorial authority. It was not his last encounter with official displeasure.

In 1834, at the age of twenty-one, Richard Wagner became conductor of the Magdeburg Opera Company. How he managed that no one knows. Supporters of the Bayreuth tradition are inclined to sniff at the lack of appreciation of a country which gave to the genius that Wagner undoubtedly was only the position of conductor of a provincial opera house. But who knew that he was a genius? Not even *Rienzi* was behind him. To hold such a place at his age was remarkable; it is an achievement that belies the constant insistence of Cosima's group that Wagner's attainments were always unequal to his merit until she entered his life.

The new engagement gave him his first opportunity to stage a work of his own. He entered on his duties in the summer of 1834,

and early in the spring of 1836 the first performance of *Forbidden Love* was announced. And then came Wagner's first clash with the authorities.

The two performances that were to be given were set for Holy Week. *Forbidden Love* was a title that struck the official mind as rather unpromising at any time, and its unfitness for a performance at that particular season of the year was even more marked. Wagner was informed that his opera could not be produced.

Richard Wagner was never good at ingratiation. His method was to attack, to explode in dudgeon when he could not have his way. His position in Magdeburg was not sufficiently assured for such a technique. So perhaps he used his favourite method of working through persons with influence. It seems hardly likely that he should succeed unaided in convincing the police that any opera drawn from Shakespeare must of necessity be highly respectable, but someone convinced them of that. The ban was withdrawn and the opera, with the new title of *The Novice of Palermo* (*Die Novize von Palermo*) was given.

Just ten days were allotted to the preparation of the opera and its first performance was

naturally miserable. The second night was to be a benefit night for Wagner, and his always weak finances would have benefited by it, despite the poor impression the piece made on its first appearance, if chance had not cheated him of his perquisite. One of the members of the company accused another of having made an attempt on the virtue of his wife with entirely too much success, and a battle royal, in which most of the company joined, ensued just before the curtain should have risen. The performance was cancelled and the admission fees were refunded to the audience.

The junior lead of this turbulent company was a popular and charming young actress with a promising future before her. She was twenty-seven in this year of 1836, when Richard Wagner was twenty-three. Her name was Wilhelmine Planer; but in the history of Wagner's life she is known as Minna.

CHAPTER III

WAGNER'S FIRST LOVE

MINNA PLANER was the first woman to produce any important reaction in Wagner's life. There had been adventures before. They are hinted at in the Autobiography; but there had been nothing serious about them. Not until the youthful conductor, penniless and, so far as he knew at that time, without hopeful prospects for the future, fell under the influence of the charming young actress (who was one of the principal members of the company, and so well known that managers sought her services) did the idea of marriage come to him. It came quickly enough then, and he deluged Minna with appeals to marry him. This we know on the evidence of the letters in the Burrell Collection. We should never have guessed it from the Autobiography.

Until now the sole source of information on the Minna period of Wagner's life has been that Autobiography together with carefully edited letters, all issuing from the same guarded source and under the same suspicion

Charles Lavell Photo

OIL PORTRAIT OF MINNA PLANER WHEN SHE WAS ON THE STAGE BEFORE HER MARRIAGE TO WAGNER. A LOCK OF HER HAIR SET UNDER GLASS IN THE FRAME

(*Unpublished, heretofore unknown in Burrell Collection*)

Sechzehntes

ABONNEMENT-CONCERT

im Saale des Gewandhauses,

Donnerstag, den 23sten Februar 1832.

Erster Theil.

Ouverture, von Richard Wagner.

Scene und Arie aus Elise e Claudio, von Mercadante, vorgetragen von Dem. Grabau.

Elis. Mici cari figli — ah! voi dormite ignari
Di vostra sorte — oh quanto è dolce il sonno
Dell' innocenza! — ei fugge
Dagli occhi miei: lo risospinge il pianto,
Lo spaventa il dolor. Già scorse un anno —
Un anno — oh Dio! — sposo crudel! — qual mai,
Qual da noi ti divide obblio funesto? —
Quella ch'è pur tua prole e mia, sovente
Di te mi chiede — io madre, io le rispondo
Con mentito sorriso — e il pianto ascondo.
Giusto ciel, deh! più sereno
I miei voti alfin ricevi.
Stringa il padre i figli al seno,
Rieda omai lo sposo a me.
Sul mio capo, ah! sol, se vuoi,
Sfoga pur gli sdegni tuoi.
Abbian pace i figli almeno,
Se la madre è in odio a te.
Ah! se a me riede
L'amato bene:
Ampia mercede
Quest' alma avrà.
Di tante e tante
Sofferte pene
Un solo istante
Trionfera.

Andante und Rondo für den Fagott, von M. von Weber, vorgetragen von Hrn. Schmidtbach.

Charles Lavell Photo

ONE OF THE EARLIEST PROGRAMS ON WHICH WAGNER'S NAME APPEARED

of having been distorted to agree with a preconceived conception of the life of Wagner. The originals of the published letters of Wagner have, for the most part, never been accessible. There has been no means of checking the published editions, no way of knowing how far the work of editing may not have involved suppressing, altering and even adding.

So we have had to take the word of the Autobiography, suspect as it has been. The Autobiography deals only with the period of Wagner's life ending with his rupture with Minna. Even the five years, added without a word of explanation by some unknown hand (no doubt the author of that added part believed that no copy of the original "Mein Leben" would ever fall into the hands of the public to reveal the addition), brings the story only to the death of Minna, which occurred in 1866. The need for a gloss was then finished. With Minna disposed of, as an important factor in Wagner's life, Cosima remained to shine alone.

Yet how unfair to Minna, to suppress all evidence concerning those long years with her struggling and always difficult husband, save what is to be found in this Autobiography! It

was begun in 1866, as soon as Minna was dead and out of the way. It was hardly a time when Wagner could have been expected to deal justly by the wife whom he had so recently left. Nor could it have been taken down any more impartially by the person to whom it was dictated —Cosima! Four years before his second marriage, when Cosima had just succeeded in winning Richard from his first wife, she was entrusted with the task of assisting him to put down the account from which the world was to draw almost the only available knowledge about Minna. What assistance Cosima gave is impossible to say; but the German of "Mein Leben" possesses a faint foreign flavour which is not to be found in any of Wagner's other writings. It is often not the German of a German, but it might have been the German of a woman brought up in France—Cosima's German in short.

It was with the Autobiography that the builders of the Bayreuth tradition began to rear their monstrous and fictitious edifice. The Autobiography is, indeed, the main pillar of that tradition. It was intended to give that view of Wagner's earlier life best calculated to excuse his conduct and that of Cosima; and the

woman, whose guile, if the reputation of her sex is worth anything, should have been greater than that of her lover, took care to put it down herself in order to make sure that there should be no mistakes. It is a diabolically clever piece of work.

It is clever, because the insinuations against Minna are apparently dragged reluctantly from her former lover. It would never have done to make Wagner an innocent victim of an unscrupulous woman; that would have lessened Cosima's victory; moreover, it would have been so far from the truth as to provoke contradiction. Besides, although Natalie had turned over a large number of her mother's letters to Wagner, he knew that there were others that had not been returned. He could not know if Natalie was keeping them or if they had been destroyed. But he feared, perhaps, that some of them might turn up one day in the wrong hands, and escape the vigilance of the guardians of the tradition. If he had suspected that so many of the early letters of the Minna period would be found at a later date, he would perhaps have realized the uselessness of trying to controvert their evidence at all. But he probably never suspected the importance, even

if he suspected the existence, of the papers that Natalie had kept.

Even so, the story of Minna as Wagner tells it, is probably very much what he believed it to be. Cosima must have known better, but Cosima was undoubtedly a clever enough woman to encourage Wagner in his eternal self-dramatizing, self-pitying, self-justifying. It gave an air of greater verisimilitude to the Autobiography—though, even then, it was sufficiently suspicious, on internal evidence alone, to make every biographer of Wagner, except those in the group engaged in fighting for the Bayreuth tradition, question its veracity.

Cosima was a clever woman. Mrs. Burrell appears to have been a cleverer. The complicated structure of the Autobiography, with its justification and gloss of Wagner's early life, was her starting point. Using the Autobiography as her guide, she sought out the persons mentioned, went to the places named, followed the trail of the Autobiography in her search for material. Thus every point that the Autobiography took special pains to explain, to cover up, to justify, provided a clue for Mrs. Burrell. The result is that this very period of Wagner's life which the Autobiography sought

to obscure, has now been opened up. The very truths that the Autobiography was designed to hide were indicated to the searcher by the screens set before them.

In the Burrell Collection, then, we have just what is needed to check the accuracy of the Autobiography. We find that "Mein Leben" is very reliable as to dates. Wagner himself gives us the reason when he tells us that since his youth he made it a point to jot down memoranda in a large note-book, which he had before him when he wrote his Autobiography. It is very unreliable as to the main events of his life. The Burrell Collection enables us particularly to check his own account of his love affairs, and they are very different from what Wagner wanted us to believe.

The owners of the Burrell Collection, then, do not go too far when they claim that it is certainly the second and probably the first in importance, of all Wagner collections. In the preface to the catalogue, they say:

> The published letters of Wagner amount to rather more than three thousand. If the originals of these published letters were known to exist, the Burrell letters would

even form a respectable block when put side by side with them. But it is hardly likely that these originals do exist; most of them were swept into what the chief—and a very sincere—upholder of the Bayreuth tradition calls "The Wahnfried Strongbox" (the reference is to Ashton Ellis); but that strongbox must have been an incinerator as well. It is remarkable that in all these printed and published books of Wagner's letters not a word is to be found about the originals. If these were not destroyed, they would be a permanent danger to the Bayreuth tradition. For they might at any moment leap to light and discredit the printed volumes; these volumes, from being supports, would turn into explosives to blow the tradition up. If these originals do still exist, this Burrell Collection is only the second collection of Wagner letters. If they have ceased to exist, as is here conjectured, it can perhaps claim to be the first.

If the production of the originals from which the official Bayreuth versions of the letters were drawn does not follow the publication of the evidence about to be presented, the Burrell Collection is certainly the first, as the catalogue

claims. For the new letters do effectively blow up the Bayreuth tradition; and if their appearance does not force the production of the Bayreuth originals, that can only mean that those originals have been destroyed.

What, then, is the account that Wagner's Autobiography and the carefully selected and presented letters give of Wagner's love for Minna Planer; and what is the account that the newly discovered letters yield? That latter account is much more complete than the Bayreuth chroniclers could have given, even had they been disposed to set forth all their facts without alteration or suppression; for the first letter to Minna in the collection, probably the first Wagner ever wrote to his wife, is dated May 6, 1835, while the first letters in the official collections are dated 1842, seven years later. Moreover, in almost every instance where a reference in one published letter is made to another concerning which the editors have explained that the mentioned letter no longer exists, that missing letter is to be found in the Burrell Collection. It is indeed fortunate that these letters *did* go to the Burrell Collection and not to the Wahnfried strongbox, for there are references in letters that we now have to

other letters which Natalie turned over to Wahnfried *which have, nevertheless, never been published!* Who suppressed them?

The Autobiography's account of Wagner's early years does him little credit. He misrepresents and depreciates himself, he appears constantly inferior to his real self. From the standpoint of the Bayreuth tradition it must be so, for that tradition is devoted to the theory that he was a poor creature until he met Cosima. No one reading the Autobiography could have a very high opinion of Wagner as a young man. He is dissipated, weak and foolish. This explains his marriage with Minna, who is painted as a plodding housewife with no particularly outstanding qualities. It is intimated that Wagner entered marriage reluctantly, and that Minna was more anxious to marry than he was. That she left him on two occasions appears as her own fault, although, reading between the lines of the Autobiography, one must realize that Wagner was no easy person to live with. The second time she left him, the impression is created by the Bayreuth tradition that she appealed to be taken back, and that her husband magnanimously received her. Throughout the published letters the impression is given of a

housewife failing to understand genius, and finally provoking the definite rupture by unreasonable jealousy over what was merely a beautiful friendship. During his life with Minna, Wagner's genius was unable to come to fruition; during his life with Cosima, it was nurtured and drawn forth. This is the Bayreuth tradition.

What the newly discovered letters tell us is something entirely different.

Wagner appears in his true light as a most extraordinary young man. He is extremely ambitious, he has mapped out his aims for the future—exactly the aims he was to achieve—and among them is his marriage with Minna. It was Wagner who pressed for marriage. Minna had evidently permitted him to have an affair with her, but she had no intention of marrying him. The same force that produced his tremendous operas gave him success with Minna, but it was only after repeated efforts. After all, he was penniless, and despite his precocity, his great future was unguessed at.

Minna was not, as the Bayreuthers hint, attaching herself to a great man, unworthy as she was. She was an actress with a career before her, and it was hardly good sense in her to

marry this young man with no present and no apparent future. It was all very well for Cosima Wagner to sniff at Minna for marrying a great musician; he *was* a great musician when Cosima married him, but when Minna married him he was a nobody. No woman ever loved Wagner for his music. Some of them were attracted by his success; but it requires no particular talent to perceive success, which is the result of everyone else having recognized a worth which may or may not actually exist.

Throughout her life with Wagner, Minna battled with poverty and hardship. She became, indeed, the housewife, and it was well for Wagner that she did. He needed someone to take care of him. There were many times when but for Minna he would have gone hungry, in spite of his gift for getting "loans" from friends to whom he was already heavily indebted. There was at least one occasion when she saved him from death or imprisonment. Minna was just the wife that Wagner needed at that time. He had a gift for finding the women who were necessary to him. She took care of him during the hard years when he was giving birth to his great works. When that labour was over, when what Wagner needed

was a younger woman, able to give him the leisure to add the finishing touches to what he had already conceived, to secure performances, to furnish influential friends, he let Minna go, and married Cosima, leaving Minna to die of a broken heart. Yes, Minna was the housewife the Bayreuth tradition makes her out to be; but she was never the dull, colourless creature the Cosima faction saw, and it was Wagner who turned her from a stage star into an overworked *hausfrau*. We may say that Wagner's music was not bought too dearly at the price of Minna's suffering; but it is ignoble to rob her of her share in his glory.

As for the final break and the blame for it, that will come later. Minna bore with many of her husband's infatuations before that with Mathilde Wesendonck, which was the beginning of the end. It seems likely that the trained biographers have chosen that particular episode on which to concentrate their attention as it was, perhaps, the only time that Wagner was not as unfaithful as he wanted to be.

The story of Wagner's first meeting with Minna is told by himself in the Autobiography. But before quoting it, it will be interesting to look at the preface of this work. It is written

with every appearance of fairness, but a careful reading will reveal between the lines the partisan purpose for which it was written. The italics emphasize the passages which give away the carefully hidden purpose of the author—or, rather, authors. After reading this preface we can more easily understand the frame of mind of the Autobiography, of which several passages must be quoted for comparison with the letters.

> The contents of these volumes have been written down directly from my dictation, over a period of several years, by my friend and wife, *who wished me* to tell her the story of my life. It was the desire of *both* of us that these details of my life should be accessible to our family and to *our sincere and trusted friends;* and we have decided, therefore, in order to provide against a possible destruction of the one manuscript, to have a small number of copies printed at our own expense. As the value of this autobiography consists in its unadorned veracity (*sic*), which, under the circumstances, is its only justification, therefore my statements had to be accompanied by precise names and

dates; hence there could be no question of their publication *until some time after my death*, should interest in them still survive in our descendants, and on that point I intend leaving directions in my will.

If, on the other hand, we do not refuse certain intimate friends a sight of these papers now, it is that, relying on their genuine interest in the contents, we are confident that *they will not pass on their knowledge* to any *who do not share their feelings* in the matter.

In the light of our present information, could anything be plainer? Once again there is too much protestation in the entirely correct admission that the value of the Autobiography consists in its veracity—which unfortunately is not its most remarkable characteristic. The preface gives away the fact that Cosima instigated the writing of the Autobiography, and that it is to be kept secret, confided to the trusted guardians of the Bayreuth tradition which this work was to found, until all the witnesses for the opposition were dead. Then it was to be printed and Minna's place with future generations assured.

The year is 1834. Wagner has reached Magdeburg to take up his duties as conductor of the company in which Minna appears. His own account of the meeting is as follows:

> People offered to help me in finding a lodging, and a young actor . . . undertook to be my guide . . . While he was taking me to the best lodging he knew, he told me that presently he would do me the kindness of making me the housemate of the prettiest and nicest girl to be found in the place at the time. She was the junior lead of the company, Mademoiselle Minna Planer, *of whom doubtless I had already heard.*
>
> As luck would have it, the promised damsel met us at the door of the house in question. Her appearance and bearing formed the most striking contrast possible to all the unpleasant impressions of the theatre which it had been my lot to receive on this fateful morning. Looking very charming and fresh, the young actress's general manner and movements were full of a certain majesty and grave assurance which lent an agreeable and captivating air of dignity to her otherwise pleasant expression. Her scrupulously clean

and tidy dress completed the startling effect of the unexpected encounter. After I had been introduced to her in the hall as the new conductor, and after she had done regarding with astonishment the stranger who seemed so young for such a title, she recommended me kindly to the landlady of the house, and begged that I might be well looked after; whereupon she walked proudly and serenely across the street to her rehearsal.

Even in the partisan pages of the Autobiography, Wagner cannot help from time to time contradicting the laboriously created picture of Minna which Cosima hoped to palm off on the world. The underlined words (not underlined, of course, by Wagner) indicate that the condescension in the marriage was not on the part of the unknown orchestra leader but rather on that of the already popular actress. That Minna was indeed well known is borne out by a group of letters in the Burrell Collection. In the period from December 23, 1833, to March 6, 1836, there are eleven offers of engagements, all from different cities. One, from Berlin, she accepted, and this led to the letters from Wagner which we find in the Burrell Collec-

tion, covering the month of November, 1835. At the conclusion of that engagement she accepted another, in Koenigsberg, and this time the result was her marriage to Wagner.

But there is much history before the marriage—the history of Wagner's frantic pleadings for the honour of marrying the woman whom he was later to represent as being particularly anxious to marry him.

Looking back from the success of later years, Wagner seems to feel that he had not been sufficiently appreciated when, as a mere boy, he was permitted to conduct an orchestra in a not insignificant provincial city. "The fact that I submitted without bitterness and even with some cheerfulness to this unworthy use of my musical talent," he writes (and here, as elsewhere when quoting the Autobiography, we underline the phrases which throw more or less subtle insinuations on the character of Minna), "was due less to my taste being at this period . . . *in its salad days*, than to my intercourse with Minna Planer, who," he continues, "seemed very much like a fairy," as she was supposed to be, in the opera he happened to be discussing at the time. After outlining the growth of a friendship which he has up to that

point certainly not delineated as very warm in feeling, he writes a paragraph which the evidence of the letters enables us to put down unmistakably as false. Minna, it seems, became jealous. Wagner records that "my artless solicitation for her favour, by which at that time *I meant nothing serious*, and in which a man of the world would merely have seen the exuberance of a *youthful and easily satisfied infatuation*," had been taken in earnest. "*I was astonished to learn*, first from her reserved manner and later from her own lips, *that she felt compelled to inquire into the seriousness of my intentions*, and to consider their consequences." She was, he further notes, "on very intimate terms," with a young nobleman whose straitened circumstances made marriage out of the question.

On his own authority the new year, 1835, was a turning point in Wagner's life. He speaks of an estrangement from Minna after a "rupture," of which, however, we have no record, unless he means the change in her demeanour which he attributes to jealousy. Their friendship remained "cool and *purposely* indifferent." Minna, Wagner tells us, was permitting the attentions of several young noblemen,

and distant as he was, Wagner seemed to have retained the right to protest with "bitterness and insistence." But at a party given by himself he succeeds in impressing the rest of the guests by the extent of his intimacy with Minna, an effect which, he intimates, he has brought about to spite another young lady who has set her cap at him.

> From this time onward I remained permanently on the best of terms with Minna. I do not believe that *she ever felt any sort of passion or genuine love for me*, or indeed, that *she was capable of such a thing*. . . . My eccentric nature, which she knew so well how to humour pleasantly by her gentleness, stimulated her to the continual exercise of the power, *so flattering to her own vanity*, and *without ever betraying any desire or ardour herself*, she never met my impetuous advances with coldness.

There follows a scene in which Wagner cuts a very poor figure indeed. He gets drunk, comes to tea with Minna, and so insults a woman guest that she leaves in anger. Minna, treating him much better than he deserves, puts

him to bed on her own couch, where he sleeps all night. "From that day forward, freely and openly, (we) gratified our desires as an acknowledged pair of lovers."

Up to this time, Wagner and Minna had been together. There are, therefore, no letters covering this period. But the theatrical season ended. Minna stayed in Magdeburg, and Wagner went to Leipzig. From there he bombarded her with frantic love-letters which showed only too clearly that the sedulously cultivated impression that his intentions were not serious, but that Minna took them as too much so, was entirely false.

Probably the first love-letter that Wagner ever wrote to his first wife is in the Burrell Collection, dated May 6, 1835. Like all the rest that will be produced in evidence against the Bayreuth tradition and Cosima Wagner, this letter has never been published. It is written from the home of his sister, Rosalie, and is signed "Richard." The next two are written on the 10th and the 25th of the same month. All are signed by his first name. Then comes a draft of a letter which Minna is to write to the manager of the Magdeburg Theatre, scribbled on the back of one of Minna's letters to an

unknown correspondent, an indication that the pair were sufficiently intimate for Richard to have letters of Minna's with him in Leipzig. These letters are also affectionate, but none of them as important as those he was to write a few months later. Yet they prove sufficiently that Richard was the aggressor, and that Minna was constantly in his mind, despite the gratuitous observation of Ashton Ellis, a fervent supporter of the Bayreuth tradition, in his volume of Wagner's family letters that "it is worthy of note that, albeit the young man had already met and fallen in love with his future wife, Minna, between Nos. 3 and 4 (the numbers refer to letters in the volume), her name is mentioned neither in No. 4 nor in either of its two successors."

But how do we know, since we have never been permitted to see the originals, that there were not once references to Minna in Richard's letters to his family which have been quietly suppressed? Both the May and November letters, which straddle those of which Mr. Ellis talks, show that Wagner, despite his disavowal, took his affair with Minna with extreme seriousness.

Between these two periods he sees her again,

and after describing a gay holiday with her, takes fright at the possibility that he is making out too good a case for Minna, and adds: "Indeed, my subsequent long and anxious connexion with Minna, interwoven as it was with the most painful and bitter vicissitudes, has often appeared to me as a persistently prolonged expiation of the brief and harmless enjoyment of those few days."

In another moment of carelessness he admits that Minna's mother did not look with entire favour upon him as a son-in-law. But this slip is repaired by a studious effort to maintain the impression that marriage was not in his thoughts. "The idea of marriage . . . filled me with dismay, and . . . a naïve and instinctive feeling prevented me *even from considering* the possibility of a step which would have such serious consequences. . . . Moreover, our modest circumstances were in so alarming and uncertain a state that *even* Minna declared that she was more anxious to see these improved than *to get me* to marry her." What a wealth of insinuation in those words "even" and "to get me!" Fortunately, Minna accepted an engagement in Berlin and that led to letters from Wagner; so we shall soon see what

he was really saying to Minna when he writes that he was not even considering marriage. But first let us see his own account of these letters, which he believed and hoped were lost forever.

> At last, mad with passion, I wrote to her urging her to return, and the better to move her and not to separate her fate from my own, I proposed to her *in a strictly formal manner*, and *hinted at* the hope of an early marriage.

Later he gets news from Berlin, reporting scandalous conduct on Minna's part, which, it is true, is immediately denied when he seeks the truth from the author of the rumour. This moves him to write again, with success, and in his zeal to save her from frivolous surroundings, he gets back her place in the Magdeburg company.

The deviation from the actual truth was not so great that it might not have been explained in the event of the accusing letters ever coming to light. But the impression given is so entirely untrue that it is impossible to believe it was not purposely engineered to distort the facts. Wagner did not write "at last," he wrote "at once";

he did not wait until reports came to him of scandalous behaviour, he wrote every day. And every one of those letters is in the Burrell Collection to give the lie to his Autobiography.

The first letter, dated November 4, 1835, and signed "Richard," is most remarkable. He tells Minna his life-plans, outlining the conflict between his love and his ambition, and these plans are exactly what he carried out. He reproaches her bitterly because, after he had taken a place at Magdeburg to be near her, she had left Magdeburg for Berlin. He writes again on November 5, imploring her to marry him, and signing himself "Your bridegroom." The letter shows clearly that Minna did not want to marry him. This, perhaps, was the "strictly formal manner" in which his proposal (which does not appear to have been the first) was couched.

The next day, November 6, there is another burning letter. It begins "My sweet bride." He urges her to marry him at Easter. This must be the "hint" at the hope of an early marriage. He swears that he will write to her every day until she consents. He insists that she must love him, for she left Magdeburg secretly, a sure index of her feelings.

November 7, the following day, Wagner writes in a most violent strain. He upbraids her for leaving him. No woman, he tells her —unconsciously repeating the words of all lovers—has ever been loved as she is loved by him. He will take her by force. It is the letter of a man desperately and violently in love. He adds that he believes she left him at Magdeburg with no intention of returning to him. That assumption was quite accurate. Minna preferred her promising career to Richard Wagner and 600 thalers a year, and in leaving Magdeburg was fleeing from a too importunate lover.

On November 8 he has calmed down a little. Now it is not rage but his misery in desertion that is the subject. On November 9 he accuses her of infidelity, because she has written only two letters to his six. On November 10 his announcement is most startling. She is implored to return to Magdeburg, for he has won over her mother to the idea of his marriage with Minna. Of the frantic efforts which he must have made to change the attitude of this lady there is no hint in the Autobiography. November 11 sees still another passionate letter. "I have brains and ability," Wagner wrote,

showing a confidence in himself that his own Autobiography denies him, "and in possessing you I shall have a serious incentive to use them." Minna remained obdurate, and the following day Wagner wrote: "My dear bride . . . I have just hung up my silhouette in your room." This must have had a magical effect, for Minna returned to Magdeburg. It is too bad that we have no evidence other than Wagner's as to her motive.

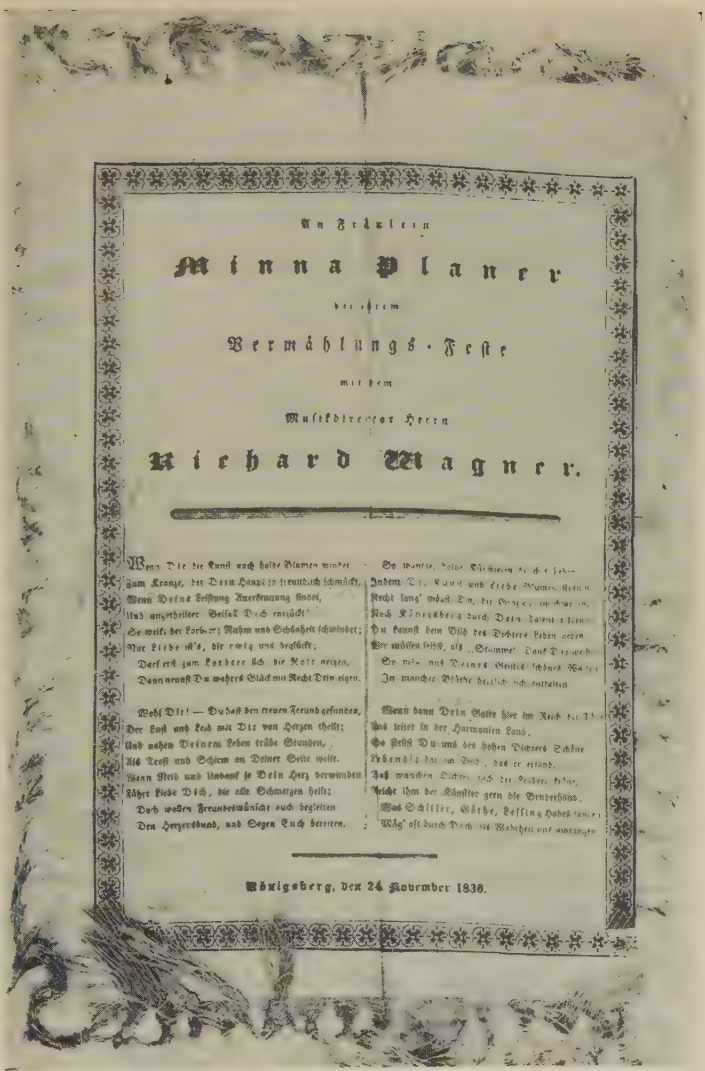
Certainly it was not to yield that she returned to Magdeburg, for he is still importuning the next time that they are separated. Minna takes her Koenigsberg engagement, and Wagner being out of work, she gets him the promise of an imminent vacancy as conductor in the theatre, an interesting commentary on their relative degrees of success at that period. But the promise fails to materialize for some time, and the two are parted once again, which gives us some more letters.

The first of these is dated May 21, 1836, and yields us the information that Minna had left Wagner only the day before. It assures her of her lover's eternal devotion. Another letter, in the same tone, dated two days later, is torn into five pieces. Natalie Planer had intended to

destroy it, but changed her mind. Then comes a long letter begun on May 29 and not finished until June 1. It is a burning love-letter, and Wagner is hoping for the post in Koenigsberg near Minna. "Arrange everything so that I can come very soon and we can get married quickly," he writes. He refers tenderly to their first meeting. Two days later he writes again, reproachfully.

Then comes another extended effort, eight pages on two different sizes of paper, closely written with even the margins filled in. This took Wagner from June 12 to June 20 to write. It is a passionate love-letter and contains convincing proof that Richard wanted to marry Minna but that she was unwilling, insisting that his circumstances would not justify marriage. Two days later there is a supreme effort to win her consent. In it he mentions the possibility of going to Riga, as he later did.

While he was writing these passionate letters to Minna, he tells us in his Autobiography—where he seems to take great pains to inform us of all the suspicions against Minna which invariably turn out to be unfounded—that he met a certain Schwabe, who was very friendly because "of a passionate interest he had conceived



An Fräulein

Minna Planer

bei ihrem

Vermählungs-Feste

mit dem

Musikdirector Herrn

Richard Wagner.

Wenn Dir die Kunst auch halbe Blumen windet
Zum Kranze, der Dein Haupt so freundlich schmückt,
Wenn Deine Leistung Anerkennung findet,
Und ungetheilter Beifall Dich entzückt!
So weilt der Lorbeer; Ruhm und Schönheit schwindet;
Nur Liebe ist's, die ewig uns beglückt;
Darf erst zum Lorbeer sich die Rose neigen,
Dann nennst Du wahres Glück mit Recht Dein eigen.

Wohl Dir! — Du hast den treuen Freund gefunden,
Der Lust und Leid mit Dir von Herzen theilt;
Und nahen Deinem Leben trübe Stunden,
Als Trost und Schirm an Deiner Seite weilt.
Wenn Neid und Undank je Dein Herz verwunden
Fährt Liebe Dich, die alle Schmerzen heilt;
Doch wollen Freundeswünsche auch begleiten
Den Herzensbund, und Segen Euch bereiten.

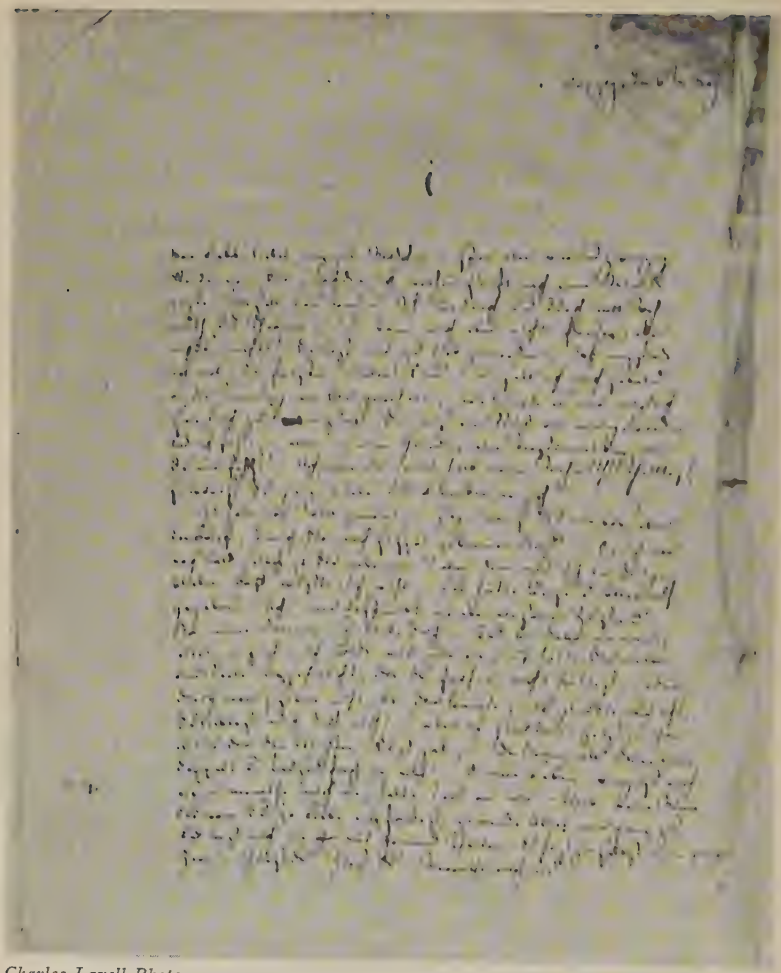
So wandle, holde Künstlerin durch's Leben
Indem Dir Kunst und Liebe Blumen streuen
Recht lang' möcht Du, die Grazie im Schweben,
Noch Königsberg durch Dein Talent erfreuen
Du kannst dem Bild des Dichters Leben geben
Wir müssen selbst, als „Stimme" Dank Dir weihen
So mög' uns Deines Geistes schönes Walten
In mancher Blüthe herrlich sich entfalten

Wenn dann Dein Gatte hier im Reich der Thöne
Uns leitet in der Harmonien Land,
So stellst Du uns des hohen Dichters Schöne
Lebendig dar im Bild, das er erfand.
Daß manchen Dichter auch der Lorbeer krönt,
Reicht ihm der Künstler gern die Brüderhand.
Was Schiller, Göthe, Lessing Hohes sangen
Mög' oft durch Dich als Wahrheit uns umfangen

Königsberg, den 24 November 1836.

Charles Lavell Photo

SILK HANDKERCHIEF DISTRIBUTED TO THE GUESTS AT THE WEDDING OF RICHARD AND MINNA WAGNER



Charles Lavell Photo

PROBABLY WAGNER'S FIRST LOVE LETTER TO MINNA

for Minna." Wagner is sure there has been no infidelity, but he is alarmed because Minna has never mentioned Herr Schwabe (whom she probably did not remember), and he did not like "the episode having been kept so secret." For this odd reason it seemed to him that "my stability as a citizen as well as my professional success would be assured by a recognized union with Minna"; so, though he "realized vaguely that I was on the wrong path," he decided to marry Minna for the sake of his "stability as a citizen." This is certainly a very poor sort of reason, especially when compared with the frank passion of the letters he wrote at the time.

He finally followed Minna to Koenigsberg, where they were married, November 24, 1836. After the two were again together, we are once more thrown upon the Autobiography for the story of that wedding of which Wagner says: "At that time I was filled only with a dim foreboding of the fateful step I was taking in marrying her." Minna, however, must have had less dim forebodings, for, according to Wagner's own account, she had already been treated to the sort of storms that she was to encounter often from this jealous man. Of the

marriage ceremony Wagner writes with a nonchalance that forbids credence:

> On the whole I was so absent-minded during this ceremony . . . that when the parson held out the closed prayer-book for us to place our wedding rings upon, Minna had to nudge me forcibly to make me follow her example.
>
> At that moment I saw, as clearly as in a vision, my whole being divided into two cross-currents that dragged me in different directions; the upper one faced the sun and carried me onward like a dreamer, while the lower one held my nature captive, a prey to some inexplicable fear. The extraordinary levity with which I chased away the conviction which kept forcing itself upon me that I was committing a twofold sin, was amply accounted for by the really genuine *affection* (*!*) with which I looked upon the young girl whose truly exceptional character (*so rare in the environment in which she had been placed*) led her thus to bind herself to a young man without any means of support.

Of this young girl's exceptional character Wagner had remarked, only two pages back,

that her manners were "characteristic of a girl sprung from the lower middle class (Wagner himself was no aristocrat), in whom mere superficial polish had taken the place of any true culture," that "she was prepared to sacrifice even her self-respect," that "it was clearly impossible for her not to lose all real sense of delicacy," and that she was "without idealism, had no artistic feeling," and possessed no talent for acting. It would really be interesting to hear Wagner's idea of a person of thoroughly bad character.

Minna was soon to discover that life with Wagner was no bed of roses. The theatre where he conducted was all but bankrupt, and Wagner was unable to support his wife. She apparently committed the crime of borrowing money, though Wagner's vagueness gives us only the definite information that he disapproved of her "making the most of her personal popularity." There were violent quarrels, and Wagner, who thrived on disputes, was surprised that his wife did not find the atmosphere entirely pleasing. "I had no idea that she was only waiting for a favourable opportunity to come to a desperate decision."

Thus he suggests that Minna had nourished

the intention of leaving him for a long time. Probably what impelled her was another jealous storm on the part of her husband who, on the authority of a meddlesome busybody who bore the common name of Schmitt, raised a rumpus with a certain Herr Dietrich, who was accused of being friendly with Minna. "I called this dangerous person to account on the subject in his own home," Wagner reports. What unconscious humour must have lurked in this line for the husbands of Jessie Laussot, Mathilde Wesendonck and Cosima von Bülow, who enjoyed the novel experience of being called to account by this same outraged lover in their own homes —who then appeared equally outraged at the temerity of these other husbands who stood between him and his chosen lovers! On May 31, five months after their marriage, Minna left with Dietrich, as one would judge from Wagner's account, though when he found her, on June 3, she was at the home of her parents. He persuaded her to return to him, but the reconciliation did not last very long. Minna left him again, and Wagner implies that she had gone to live with Dietrich, though he never actually says so. In fact, when Minna appears again in his story, she is once more with her

parents, who seem to have no use for their son-in-law.

Now comes the story of their reconciliation. It is a brazen lie. Wagner had happened to meet Minna's sister, Amalie. He tells her, without adducing any proof:

> It was certain that Minna had stayed for some time at a hotel in Hamburg with that ill-omened man, Herr Dietrich, and that she had spread abroad the story of our separation so unreservedly that the theatrical world in particular had discussed it in a manner that was positively insulting to me. I simply informed Amalie of this, and requested her to spare me any further news of her sister.
>
> Hereupon Minna herself appealed to me, and wrote me a positively heartrending letter, in which she openly confessed her infidelity. She declared that she had been driven to it by despair, but that the great trouble she had thus brought upon herself having taught her a lesson, all she now wished was to return to the right path . . . she turned to me again to acknowledge her guilt, crave my forgiveness, and assure me . . . that she had now become fully aware

of her love for me. Never before had I heard such sentiments from Minna, nor was I ever to hear the same from her again, save on one touching occasion many years later, when similar outpourings moved and affected me in the same way.

While Wagner is giving us this testimonial to his magnaminity and his wife's sinfulness in the Autobiography, in the Burrell Collection we find him quite differently engaged. On June 20 he writes to Minna, addressing her as "*Meine gute liebe, liebe Minna.*" There is nothing of the offended husband in this affectionate letter. Unfortunately, we have little correspondence for this period. There is a gap until September, when he writes to Amalie sending money and directions for her to bring her sister to Riga. At the same time he writes a very affectionate letter to Minna saying that he is longing to see her. Evidently what had really happened was that Wagner persuaded Amalie to intercede for him with Minna. More light will be shed on this subject when Natalie's statements to Mrs. Burrell on the life of Wagner and Minna are available. There is a wealth of information in the form of state-

ments from persons who are able to support or contradict the Autobiography from their own knowledge, in the Burrell Collection, but it will be several years before the entire collection is available to students.

Riga was not the scene of Wagnerian triumphs. While Richard was getting out a pompous circular addressed to "fellow members of the orchestra" (there were seven of them), Minna helped to support him by appearing in four guest performances at the local theatre, as programmes in the Burrell Collection show. Wagner retails another story of a gentleman's advances to her, referring this time to the attempt to alienate the affections of his wife as the playing of a criminal part. All these episodes follow the same pattern. Minna is invariably guiltless, but Richard as invariably contrives to fasten on her the responsibility for his own jealousy and other men's appreciation of her unusual beauty. Finally, Richard is forced to leave Riga, so heavily in debt that he and Minna are smuggled across the border, and make their way by an indirect route to Paris.

Poverty continues to dog their steps. Their condition is slightly improved by taking in a boarder, for whom Minna slaves as well as for

her husband. When they are without food and Wagner has failed to provide for them, Minna goes out and persuades butchers and grocers who have cancelled their credit to extend it once more. For this humiliating task Wagner rewards her by saying that she felt, "at least," that it was her duty.

There is little point in multiplying the contradictions between the Autobiography and the letters. They continue to give two totally different views of Wagner's life with Minna. Indeed, even the authorized published letters, edited and selected as they are, give a sunnier picture of the Wagner family than the Autobiography. Not until we come to the year 1850 have we major divergences to record.

That was the year when Wagner had his affair with Jessie Laussot. It was so important in his life and in Minna's that it will be treated in a separate chapter. We shall have to do the same for the affairs with Mathilde Wesendonck and Cosima von Bülow, so that our record of Wagner's attitude towards Minna skips the period of the rupture and brings us up to the time when Minna, ailing from the heart trouble which was aggravated by her pain, had been finally and definitely abandoned.

Minna's death in 1866, three years after Wagner had begun to live with Cosima von Bülow, was certainly hastened by the break with Wagner. He himself said, in one of the published letters (to his sister, Cecilie Avenarius, in 1859): "Her life is so entirely laid in my hand that, just as I might swiftly deal her death, of course I can only stretch it forth to tend her." Several months later in the same year he wrote to Clara Wolfram, another sister, that in regard to Minna he had recognized that there was only one choice, "either to treat her with considerate cajolery, always evading, simply soothing, ignoring all that issued from her—or frankly and definitely to abandon her to her misery. It was a matter of course that I could only choose the former." A few months later he chose the latter and the swift decline of Minna's health showed how accurately he had diagnosed his importance to her in the earlier letter.

The end of the married life of Richard and Minna Wagner, covering a quarter of a century, much of it stormy, much of it also harmonious, is clearly outlined in the Burrell Collection. A letter from Minna discloses that the two had agreed to live apart for a year, and one from Wagner deplores Minna's indifference to

him. There are three telegrams, one dated May 20, 1862, "cannot come, writing," the second, October 21, "coming." This announced the last meeting of Minna and Richard in Dresden. When Wagner returned to Vienna he wired to Minna, November 24, "Think of you anxiously."

It is significant that in the catalogue of the Burrell Collection there is listed, between this last affectionate telegram and a curt letter in which Wagner asks Minna not to write him so many complaining letters, a letter from Cosima von Bülow to Minna, in which she writes that she and her husband are going to visit Wagner because "Richard writes that he is lonely."

There are other affectionate letters from Wagner, and then, suddenly, the tone changes. Early in 1863 he writes: "You reproach me for not asking you to Prague; but you are inconsiderate and forget that a man exhausted by rehearsals wants to be quiet." Some months later he is obliged to excuse himself for having passed near Minna's refuge by a roundabout way and thus avoiding coming to see her. The next letter, unpublished like all the rest, says, "I get into a dreadful state every time a letter arrives from you."

On June 20, 1863, Richard Wagner took the decisive step. He made the temporary separation permanent. But, ready as he always was to enforce his own wishes on all the world, he seems to have been abashed at the process of dealing to his wife the blow that he himself had prophesied, not many months before, would mean her death. The letter ending their relations is written, not to Minna, but to Natalie.

It is a surprising letter, for it shows that when Wagner left Minna he had no intention of marrying again. "Experience has taught me that for us to live together would mean the greatest unhappiness," he says. "But she will always be my wife. I will remain alone and nobody will take her place. . . . My fate is loneliness and my life is work." Wagner appears a much more sympathetic character in this letter than in the dress he has assumed in his Autobiography; it is a pity that he tried to hide from the world the side of his character that produced this letter.

The letters from Richard to his wife became fewer. On February 15, 1864, he writes to her kindly to sympathize with her on the death of her sister, an echo of the old Richard

who wrote her the burning love-letters of twenty-five years before. Jubilant about his invitation from the young King of Bavaria, he writes her again three months later. There are several accounts of his adventures at Court.

But Minna was not impressed with these glories. She remembered the great creative efforts of his earlier years of poverty, and she writes sadly to an old friend, E. B. Kietz: She is living alone, a tired old lady. For two and a half years she has not seen her husband, who is living in splendour. She does not believe that he will ever come back to her, his vanity has been so greatly awakened. His heart has hardened against the "stupid old faithful companion of his life." And in his splendour, she complains, his creative work has entirely ceased. Her worry on this point makes us think of Wagner's irritation, as expressed in his Autobiography, because Minna constantly urged him, after his flight from Saxony, to give up the writing in which he indulged himself for several years, and to return to music. She was right. She saw that what was important for her husband was not to win renown but to create, everlastingly to create.

Perhaps she tried to tell her husband that, to warn him against his success. For in her effects was found the draft of a letter (was it ever sent?) in which she reproaches him gently: "Your heart is good, but in your head, where there as so many beautiful things, there are also things which are bad for those around you." But Wagner was impatient of her criticism. On October 5, 1865, he wrote her rudely that he had not read the letter she had just sent him because the letter he had received from her in the spring had saddened him so much that he had determined to embitter his memories no longer. It was probably his last word to his wife. But despite the bitterness which that letter must have caused her, she gave one final proof of her loyalty.

The anti-Wagnerian press of Munich had attacked Wagner for failing to maintain his wife, saying that she had been left in such poverty that she was forced to earn her living as a washer-woman. In a letter to the *Münchner Volksbote* Minna denied that charge. She gave this touching proof of her loyalty on January 9, 1866; on the 25th she was dead. Her will left nothing to Wagner, but, keeping from her daughter the secret of her birth, even in

death, she bequeathed everything to "my sister Natalie."

That lifelong concealment was rendered useless by Wagner a little later, when he wrote his Autobiography. Perhaps Natalie remembered the contrasting attitudes assumed towards her by her mother and stepfather when she guarded the documents now in the Burrell Collection until they had been placed in safe hands. They are secure now because of that will of Minna's, included with the other papers, which insures to the collection the indisputable title to these most precious Wagner documents.

There remains little to tell; and that little reflects no credit on Wagner. He wrote to Natalie, telling her that Minna's death had grieved him deeply; he cannot speak about it; the only thing that gives him further interest in life is his obligation to do great work—the great work that Minna had sadly seen was being forgotten in the glitter of worldly success. And then, insidiously, he asks, has Minna made any arrangements about the letters he had written to her? If not, he would like them back. Natalie returned no letters; and on October 10, 1868, he wrote her an almost

threatening letter, demanding his letters to Minna. Driven by necessity, for she was dependent on her quarterly allowance from Wagner, Natalie returned a large number of letters, telling him they were all she could find. The love-letters she kept, because she was afraid that Cosima would destroy them. Mrs. Burrell had the account from her own lips.

There is a diminuendo in the letters from Wagner to the woman who had for so long been one of his household. First he writes to give her directions about Minna's tombstone. Then he asks for a fire-screen that Minna once embroidered for him. He is sorry that she did not leave it to him, but he wants it and would like to buy it. His letters grow shorter; even the signatures are briefer. He writes again, thanking her for the screen. He lives in complete retirement, he says, never speaks to anyone of his past, and work is his only occupation. At this very moment he was living with Cosima von Bülow and dictating to her the libel on the memory of Minna which he named "Mein Leben." A short letter: the foot of the screen stand has not arrived. A shorter: it has arrived.

But it was not the end. Natalie was to hear again from her stepfather. He wrote to con-

gratulate her on her approaching marriage, and after she had married, one letter more—he can no longer pay her an allowance. Cosima had won.

CHAPTER IV

MONEY

ARTISTS have always had the reputation of being careless about making money, sometimes about lending it. Richard Wagner was careless about repaying it—or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that he was careful not to repay it. He borrowed money from everyone who had any, and the surest way to lose his friendship was to try to get it back. The great number of friends whom Wagner lost during his lifetime, the number of changes of dedications to his works, the many virulent attacks he made on persons who had formerly been on good terms with him, can generally be explained by their refusal to lend him money.

During the first part of his life—until after his fiftieth year—Wagner was always short of money. He never had as much as he wanted. This was partly because he wanted so much. His tastes were extremely extravagant. He ran through considerable sums in years when he was living in poverty—because he spent as fast as he borrowed; more often he spent faster.

He had to be smuggled across the frontier at Riga, when he left Russia, because he had left so many debts behind him. At Paris the family budget was helped out from time to time by taking in a lodger for whom Minna served as a sort of maid of all work.

And yet it must be said in Wagner's defence that he was not avaricious. At least one person (his friend and Minna's, the artist, E. B. Kietz) occasionally benefited by loans from Wagner. Probably the durability of his friendship with Kietz is partly explained by the fact that Kietz was too poor to lend him anything. There was no opportunity for that invariable cause of dissension to arise.

Wagner borrowed because he was a man who was unable to deny himself. If he wanted anything, he had to have it. The force of character that made him great exaggerated his vices as well as his virtues. His weak points were strong ones. He always needed money and he insisted upon getting it. Paying it back was not among the things he wanted to do, and so he didn't do it. In his universe the desires of only one person in the world counted for anything, and that one person was Richard Wagner.

In a sense, he was a good business man, for he succeeded admirably in borrowing tremendous sums of money. He was not, however, a good business man in the sense that he realized the value of establishing his credit by repaying his creditors. His borrowing was not a cold commercial transaction, though his methods of getting money and the manner in which he prepared a long way ahead for plucking his victims were cool enough. He was like a little boy who insisted upon having all the shiny new toys in the shop window. Unlike most little boys he got them; and the cunning which he employed to fulfil those desires was much like the cunning of little boys who often succeed in persuading their parents to buy them what they want. Perhaps it was the very *naïveté*, the astounding and incredible machinations which Wagner employed to borrow money, that made him successful at it. No one believed that a man would have the impudence to make the demands he made unless he intended to repay his benefactors. Wagner had the impudence (because he regarded asking for what he wanted as his right and not as impudence at all) and so he succeeded. The ease with which he made his demands and the righteous indignation and

fury with which he greeted any refusal sprang from his belief that he was so great a man that the world—and consequently all the individuals with whom he came in contact—owed him a living. He was quite correct in that belief, but modesty is still accounted a virtue, and it does not make us find the character of Richard Wagner any more sympathetic to hear that he had a pet parrot which he had taught to say, "Richard Wagner, you are a great man."

It was fortunate that Wagner was good at finance. If he had not been a good enough business man to persuade people to put money behind him and behind his operas we might never have had many of them, and those that were composed might have been entirely different. A composer of opera cannot sit down with pencil and paper for his only tools, like a poet, and finish his creation. He requires a tremendous organization, a vast orchestra, a large theatre, massive scenery and, most important of all, financial backing to pay for all the other things. Wagner got his financial backing.

What made his task more difficult was that he was the most exacting composer who had ever raised difficulties for producers to contend with. His insistence on having what he

wanted, which made him at times so unsocial a character and so dangerous a friend, became, in his artistic work, integrity. His nature was to demand majestic, splashing, lavish, even impossible effects. He refused to compromise with practicability. He wrote what he wanted and then not only hypnotized opera companies into attempting his impossible fantasies but actually made them keep to the directions he had prescribed.

Wagner could not have done this if he had not been a man of great force and of engaging personality. When we point out, as we are bound to do in this disentangling of the accepted facts on Wagner, that he was in many ways a most unpleasant person and not the angel the Bayreuth tradition would have him to be, we must not forget that he had his great merits as well as his great defects. When he was not crossed, when he had his own way, he seems to have been a most interesting and charming companion. If he had been otherwise he could hardly have persuaded different people at various times to take up the problem of his support, as did Otto Wesendonck when Wagner was doing his best to alienate his wife's affections. Herr Wesendonck actually pro-

vided a home for Wagner next door to his own, which was very convenient for the composer in his attempts to seduce his benefactor's wife. Perhaps that benefactor knew his wife better than Wagner did; that affair we will go into in greater detail later on.

There is not nearly as much about Wagner's debts in his Autobiography and letters, as published under the guidance of the supporters of the Bayreuth tradition, as their importance in his life would justify. That is probably not due to Wagner's being ashamed of the extent of his borrowings. As has been pointed out above, he considered them perfectly justified, and when anyone was not flattered at being permitted to lend him money, he believed sincerely that he was justified in being infuriated. It was an honour to lend money to the greatest living composer!

There was another reason for suppressing the details of his successful borrowings, in the Autobiography and letters, while emphasizing his really terrible poverty. That was to carry on the idea that, until he left Minna and was taken up by Cosima, he had had little success, that he had been unable to drag himself unaided to prosperity. As a matter of fact, to put

Wagner's success forward to his fifty-seventh year in this fashion is a grave mistake. Wagner had achieved the impossible during his life with Minna. But his energy, his success, the evident proofs of his genius at this period of his life did not coincide with the idea carefully nourished at Bayreuth that Wagner was, so to speak, a product of Cosima. The period of brilliant success, of basking in the limelight, of having a whole kingdom at his beck and call (and of the cessation of creative production, as Minna sadly saw from the isolation of her desertion), came from the King of Bavaria as a result of a meeting which occurred before Cosima entered his life. Cosima does not deserve the credit for that stultifying brilliancy any more than Minna deserves the blame for a barren period that was barren only according to the accounts inspired by the jealous mistress of Wahnfried.

What did Wagner do, by his own driving force and personal magnetism, in those years which the Bayreuth tradition finds so barren? He was born a German and Germany was a poor country, struggling under the yoke of many courts and petty kings whose little splendours had to be kept going at the expense of the

tax-ridden people. There were many theatres in Germany, but few of them paid. They struggled on the edge of bankruptcy, except those which had the good fortune to be, in effect, the private theatres of reigning princes.

Wagner started out with his ambitious operatic plans fully fledged, as he outlined them in an early letter to Minna, and as he had also outlined them to a friend of his youth named Apel. He had a scheme that needed a lot of money and he had to carry it through in a country where there was no money at all. He had no kind of connexions whatsoever, no influential patrons.

His family was more or less tied up with the stage, and that hardly implied social standing.

There was very little money to be earned in Germany, and few lucrative posts, but young Wagner managed to get a few of them—one, as we have seen, with Minna's help. They were posts which much older and better known men might have liked to get. At the age of twenty-three he succeeded in having his first opera, *Forbidden Love*, performed. At the age of twenty-nine, in an operatic world overcrowded with the simultaneous presence of

Berlioz, Spontini, Balfe, Mendelssohn, Verdi, Rossini, Spohr, Gounod, Offenbach, Weber, Boieldieu, Bellini, Auber, Meyerbeer, Herold, Donizetti, Halévy, Lortzing and Schumann, he succeeded in having *Rienzi* produced, despite tremendous technical demands and a length of six hours! *Lohengrin* was performed when he was thirty-seven, and Wagner was already sufficiently celebrated to be invited to conduct the Philharmonic Society's concerts in London at the highest salary the Society had ever paid.

He was equally successful in finding financial backers for his personal expenses. An idea of his technique can be gleaned from a letter to his niece, Franziska Ritter, who had married the son of a woman who had for a long time given Wagner an allowance.

DEAREST FRANZE,

You are a clever creature, and have your heart in the right place. The 1000 thaler man is found, if you can bring him to the scratch. Listen! Go to (the name has been suppressed by the editors, but it is assumed to be a friend of his youth, Theodore Apel, already referred to); he's rich, a friend of my young days, and fond of me. He made sac-

rifices to my giddy youth before; now let him make them to more noble interests. . . . Tell him I am prepared to give a grand concert at Leipzig in February if *he* will put an end to my atrocious plight now by an immediate advance of 1000 thaler. For a gift of honour from my birthplace might perhaps be made its object not without some *sense*. I will promptly repay the 1000 thaler out of that February receipt; or if it doesn't amount to that, I will make up the balance from my subsequent Berlin concert takings.

Tell him what the Ritters did for me so long, and how sorry you all are to be unable to do anything more now. In short, don't flinch; he *must!* Should the height of the sum prove an obstacle, lower it to 600 thaler if need be. If you bring off the 1000 thaler, Sascha (Franziska's husband) shall have his 100 back at once. At the very worst (Apel) must lend me 200 thaler, which should be promptly despatched to my wife. . . . Now look sharp!

I had a sleepless night, and this solution suddenly occurred to me as so simple—but *you* alone can work it.

Please telegraph me the result (discreetly

worded) *immediately* to Biebrich. I hope for that despatch, let's say, to-morrow . . . noon.

For consummate cheek, it would be hard to beat this exhibition. On the ground that they have lent him money before until they can't do it any more Wagner demands of the Ritters that they make an appeal for him to a friend of his. That friend, in exchange for his 1000 thaler, was to have the privilege of getting up a concert for Wagner to enrich him further. The promise to repay, regularly a feature of Wagner's borrowing letters, was never taken seriously by anyone who had ever lent him any money before. The suggestion that the demand should be whittled down until the loan was forthcoming, and the surprising audacity of offering a commission for getting it (and a commission that only meant the paying of a loan received earlier) are delicious examples of the most perfect effrontery. Finally, we have two of the stock tricks of the professional borrower—the "sleepless night," to arouse sympathy for a hopeless position, and the insistence that the person addressed is the *only* one who can remedy matters. The less responsible bor-

rowers are, the more skill they seem to have in making others feel responsible for them.

How Wagner regarded his somewhat unusual financial arrangement is demonstrated in the very next letter in his family correspondence, from which the preceding exhibit was taken. He writes, in an extremely short letter: "Heavens, dearest Franze, how the world does rack me! Nix; nix! I don't get a step forward, have a frantic deal to do here, and can't give a thought to my money mess; so others must!" Well, others very frequently did.

The readiness with which Wagner demanded money from the most unlikely sources and the indignation which he felt at being refused could hardly be exemplified more clearly than in the case of Baron Robert von Hornstein, to which Ernest Newman gives considerable space in his excellent biography. Von Hornstein was friendly with the Wagners at Zurich, and was often invited to dine with them. To friends of Wagner he had expressed his regret at not being able at that time to invite them in turn, to which these friends (the Ritters, who knew him very well indeed) returned: "Wagner does not at all expect this now. He knows your circumstances and is sure to follow you up later.

He is waiting for a more favourable moment."

It is not strange that von Hornstein was a little taken aback at this interpretation of Wagner's friendliness with him, but he was assured: "Oh, there is no doubt Wagner likes you and prizes your talents greatly; but these calculations are too much second nature with him for him to be able to make an exception."

However, an exceedingly embarrassing incident severed the relations between the two. When he invited them to dinner Wagner expected his guests to bring wine with them, but Hornstein, who had, of course, been very correctly brought up, could not bring himself to offer what appeared to him to be a gratuitous insult to his host. One night, when Hornstein and another gentleman dined with the Wagners, the composer called for the wine list of a neighbouring restaurant, read out the names and prices of the wines, and finally selected and ordered a bottle. When it had been fetched and drunk, he turned to Hornstein and his friend and asked, with evident intention to offend, if he should now present *another* thaler to them? That ended the relations between Wagner and Hornstein for some years.

In December, 1861, some five years later,

Hornstein received this extraordinary letter from Wagner.

DEAR HORNSTEIN,

I hear that you have become rich. In what a wretched state I myself am you can easily guess from my failures. I am trying to retrieve myself by seclusion and a new work. In order to make possible this way to my preservation—that is to say, to lift myself above the most distressing obligations, cares, and needs that rob me of all freedom of mind—I require an immediate loan of ten thousand francs. With this I can again put my life in order, and again do productive work.

It will be rather hard for you to provide me with this sum; but it will be possible if you *wish* it, and do not shrink from a sacrifice. This, however, I deserve, and I ask it of you against my promise to endeavour to repay you in three years out of my receipts.

Now let me see whether you are the right sort of man!

If you prove to be such for me—and why should not this be expected of someone some day?—the assistance you give me will bring

you into very close touch with me, and next summer you must be pleased to let me come to you for three months at one of your estates, preferably in the Rhine district.

I will say no more just now. Only as regards the proposed loan I may say that it would be a great relief to me if you could place even six thousand francs at my disposal immediately; I hope then to be able to arrange to do without the other four thousand francs until March. But nothing but the immediate provision of the whole sum can give me the help which I so need in my present state of mind.

Let us see, then, and hope that the sun will for once shine a little on me. What I need now is a success; otherwise, I can probably do nothing more!

Yours,

RICHARD WAGNER.

"I must confess," says Hornstein (we are quoting Newman verbatim, since his account can hardly be improved upon), "that the largeness of the amount and the tone of the letter made a refusal easier for me. What made it easier still was my knowledge that I had to do

with a bottomless cask—that while ten thousand francs were a great deal for me, they were simply nothing to him. I knew that Napoleon, Princess Metternich, Morny and Erlanger had been bled of large sums that were simply like drops of water falling on a hot stone." Hornstein was particularly grieved at the remark that the loan would draw him nearer to Wagner. "Was I not near to him, then," he asks, "before I gave him money? Was the intimate intercourse with him at the Lake of Geneva, on the Seelisberg, in Zurich, intended only to prepare the way for the borrowings he had in view when my father should die?" (This, it will be remembered, had been hinted by Karl Ritter.)

So he replied to Wagner in these terms:

Dear Herr Wagner,

You seem to have a false idea of my riches. I have a modest fortune on which I can live in plain and decent style with my wife and child. You must therefore turn to really rich people, of whom you have plenty among your patrons and patronesses all over Europe. I regret that I cannot be of service to you.

As for your long visit to "one of my estates," at present I cannot contrive a long visit; if it should become possible later I will let you know.

I have read in the papers with great regret that the production of *Tristan and Isolde* will not take place this winter. I hope that it is only a question of time, and that we shall yet hear the work. Greetings to you and your wife.

From yours,
ROBERT VON HORNSTEIN.

To which Wagner replied thus:

DEAR HERR VON HORNSTEIN,

It would be wrong of me to pass over without censure an answer such as you have given me. Though it will probably not happen again that a man like me will apply to you, yet a perception of the impropriety of your letter ought of itself to be a good thing for you.

You should not have presumed to advise me in any way, even as to who is really rich; and you should have left it to myself to de-

cide why I do not apply to the patrons and patronesses to whom you refer.

If you are not prepared to have me at one of your estates, you could have seized the signal opportunity I offered you of making the necessary arrangements for receiving me in some place of my choice. It is consequently offensive of you to say that you will let me know when you will be prepared to have me.

You should have omitted the wish you express with regard to my *Tristan;* your answer could only pass muster on the assumption that you are totally ignorant of my works.

Let this end the matter. I reckon on your discretion, as you can on mine.

Yours obediently,

RICHARD WAGNER.

The first letters in the Burrell Collection dealing with Wagner's borrowings are to his artist friend, E. B. Kietz, already mentioned. Kietz was luckier than most, for in a letter dated July 5, 1841, Wagner is actually returning to Kietz some money he has borrowed from him. This privileged position Kietz maintained while Wagner's other friends were

gradually becoming estranged from him because his friendship was too expensive a luxury for them; for in his later years, after he had left Minna, we find Wagner still trying to do something for Kietz. He must have been the only person of Wagner's acquaintance who appeared to him to need money worse than he felt he needed it himself.

Exhibit B in that collection is a draft of a letter which Minna was to write to Theodore Apel, asking for money—a letter which Mrs. Burrell characterized as "a regular begging letter." Apel had already refused to lend any more, and Wagner evidently thought that Minna's appeal might prove more effectual than his own. He was probably right, if we may judge from published specimens of Minna's letters. She approached the subject with a little more appreciation than her husband of the fact that she was asking a favour. However, in the main her letters were dictated by him, for whole passages from the draft of this letter appear in the one actually sent. The combination of Minna's greater tact and Wagner's unmatched skill at presenting his own case must have been extremely efficient.

This was during the period of Wagner's

terrific poverty in Paris; and his attempts to borrow aroused much more sympathy than those of later years. Indeed, it was not always for himself. On September 6, 1842, he wrote to his friend Kietz describing the desperate efforts he was making to borrow a small sum for him from Mme. Schroeder-Devrient, the singer, who had always showed great interest in the young musician. He writes of *Rienzi* and *The Flying Dutchman;* it was just before the production of the former, and all his hopes were pinned on it. How badly he needed the success which *Rienzi* actually attained is shown in this letter by his description of his circumstances. "My shirts are falling off me," he writes; but fortunately his pawn tickets, of which he generally had a considerable collection, would not fall due for some time.

From time to time we get glimpses of his success in persuading people to finance him. After the revolution in Saxony, in which he was involved, he writes to Minna that he is going to Zurich to live on a small pension from the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar. Evidently the pension was too small to last him for long, for a month later he writes to Natalie saying that he plans to sell all his future operas in ex-

change for a "fixed salary from a very rich music-lover." This letter was written July 10, 1849, so that by combining it with other published letters we can feel sure that the "very rich music lover" was Jessie Laussot, and that the object of her affection was rather the musician than his music. In later letters Jessie figures with equal anonymity as a prospective backer, but the official biographers of Wagner seemed to know nothing about it, and it remained for Julius Kapp to ferret out the story of Jessie Laussot and Richard Wagner.

In spite of Wagner's pension, in spite of his "very rich music-lover," he was only able to have Minna join him by writing to Liszt to send her the money for the journey, which he, the most long-suffering of Wagner's friends, and certainly the most amiable man of his day, promptly did. A few months later Liszt received another appeal from Wagner, who hoped that it would be the last occasion on which money would be mentioned between them. No doubt Liszt hoped so too, unless perhaps Wagner was referring to repayment. It was far from the last time, however.

The affair with Jessie Laussot developed in a manner that will be described later. In several

letters already known Wagner speaks of gaining financial support from an "eminent English lawyer," and in an unpublished letter in the Burrell Collection we find him speaking—as in the published letters—of taking an eastern trip, "means having suddenly been provided from London." The eminent lawyer and the sudden means are both reincarnations of the rich music-lover—Jessie Laussot, or, rather, Mrs. Taylor, Jessie's mother. Wagner was ready to elope with Jessie, who already possessed a husband, but the plan fell through. So, although he had announced to Minna that they must separate, he decided to return to her; in his very next letter to Kietz calmly writing, in order to explain his sudden abandonment of an eastern trip, that "his wife's love had overcome her suspicions." The amount of deception contained in this statement will be more readily perceived when we consider the Laussot affair in detail. The ore assays a very high percentage of fiction.

It is a pity that we cannot know how many pensions Richard Wagner managed to draw and spend to eke out his borrowings at one time. Did he actually have one from the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar? On September

14, 1850, he tells Kietz that the Ritters are supporting him; and Jessie Laussot's mother, in a letter to Minna written the previous spring, announced her intention of giving Wagner a pension of 2,500 francs a year for two years. Was he allowing three people to support him at the same time?

Wagner must have been quite a drain on the Ritters. A year later, October 4, 1851, he is still being supported by them. "What I need I get from the Ritters," he writes to Kietz, which must have been a very pleasant arrangement for him. What he did with the Ritters' money is indicated by a statement from Natalie as to his costume at Zurich. He wore snow-white trousers, a sky-blue tail coat with large gold buttons, projecting cuffs, an extremely high black top-hat with a narrow brim; carried a stick as high as himself with a huge gold knob, and topped it all off with bright saffron-yellow glacé kid gloves, thus providing an admirable costume for the tenor who will play his part when his works are perverted into a popular musical comedy on his life. He excused himself once to Praeger for his extravagance in dress so far as underclothes were concerned by saying that his skin was too sensitive to stand the

contact of anything coarser than silk. His eyes were evidently much less delicate.

The second of Wagner's famous affairs, that with Mathilde Wesendonck, which will likewise receive separate consideration in a later chapter, ended by depriving Wagner of what was a very comfortable situation financially. Otto Wesendonck, Mathilde's husband, contributed lavishly to Wagner's support, even going so far as to buy for the composer the house and plot of ground next to that on which his own villa was built. This house had to be abandoned when Wagner's attentions to his wife brought about a break between Richard and Minna. That, however, did not prevent Wagner from going to the husband with later requests for money. The surprising thing is that he was successful. Wesendonck, for instance, paid him 24,000 francs for the score of the *Ring* (it is worth much more than that now, but it certainly wasn't then) which Wagner immediately spent, half of it in paying his rent three years in advance and the rest in furnishing and decorating,—and continued his incessant borrowing.

But his poverty was nearing its end. From time to time there appear superfluous explana-

tions in the catalogue of the Burrell Collection that from one correspondent or another Wagner was borrowing money. Of course he was. But the change in his fortunes soon made it unnecessary. On May 26, 1864, he writes to Minna—now living apart from him in what was to prove a final separation—that he has accepted a pension and a home near the young King of Bavaria, who has offered to subsidize him. On March 22 of the following year he writes again, saying that the King is giving him 4000 gulden per year for three years, so that he can finish the *Ring* in peace. His troubles were over.

With the end of poverty came the end of Minna. The faithful wife who had seen him through so many years of want was left to die in a loneliness that was not mitigated by the ill-humoured tone of her husband's last letter to her. Cosima von Bülow became Cosima Wagner, and the composer soon became accustomed to the glamour and brilliance of the Court life which he had at first found distasteful. The tone of his letters changes. He grows cold towards his old friends. Kietz is still poor, and Wagner still tries to help him; but the old cordiality is missing from his notes.

But in the glittering period of his glory, when he was not far from a god to his admirers, when Bayreuth had been built for the staging of his operas, he was still unsatisfied. He was no longer poor, but he still had needs beyond his means. With other men they would have been simple desires, but Wagner made no distinction between that which he wanted and that which he must have. The habits of a lifetime were not so easily to be broken. With a considerable income at his disposal he continued to beg and borrow from everyone.

In 1872 he writes to his Hanover agents to ask them to pay a large dressmaker's bill for Cosima in Milan. It is the first time that bills for dresses seem to have absorbed any of Wagner's attention. Certainly Minna never ran up any expensive accounts. He is sixty-two now, and despite his success, is as bad about managing his finances as ever. His next letter to his agents, twelve days later, asks them to send 1500 francs to Lucerne to pay his debts there. They may have taken care of his Lucerne debts, but apparently Cosima's dresses struck the agents as a little out of their line; for they pop up again in a series of letters written to the same firm the following year.

Messrs. Volz and Batz—that was the euphonious name of his business representatives—must habitually have opened Wagner's correspondence with forebodings. On February 16, he writes for money, apparently to carry on a suit which he mentions; on March 20 he writes again: he must have money. March 26: money. On March 29, there was a pleasant surprise; nothing about money—but that was saved for another letter of the same date in which he upbraids the firm for not having paid Cosima's dressmaking bill. Skipping a less pressing letter on May 5, we discover that unless he wins his case he cannot pay for Wahnfried, the sumptuous villa he is building. On June 30 he wins—and an appeal is lodged. He must have 5000 thaler at once, and he is ready to pledge his entire income to get it. That was a careless statement to make in a business letter, but Wagner was so used to making equally rash promises in his private borrowings that he probably never considered that anyone would take him seriously.

July 2, 1873. Wagner is afraid he will never get anything out of his litigation. August 15: he is in financial difficulties and wants money. September 27: if he cannot get cash

he would like information about his expectations, particularly what he may expect to get out of his suit. October 17: he suggests a compromise on the suit, so that he can furnish his house. November 23: he is very pessimistic about getting anything at all from the litigation.

Either someone helped Wagner out about this time or there are a few letters missing in the correspondence with his long-suffering agents; for there are no more demands until March 31, 1874. Then we find Wagner going ahead steadily with his expansive plans, and as steadily calling upon others to find the wherewithal. In his first letter he says that he is moving into his new home and requires more money. On April 12, he asks for 2100 francs to pay his servants. He gets it. On June 30, he disputes with his agents about their charges —hard earned, whatever they were. On July 11 they must collect for him on performances at Copenhagen, Pesth and elsewhere. On July 15 he complains that his agents take their commissions before collecting his royalties. On July 18 he is worrying again about royalties from Pesth. He encloses a letter from Copenhagen describing the success of his work there

and complaining (quite justly) that all he is to get for the performing rights is £40, on July 27. In September he must have another 1000 florins; why has Buda-Pesth not paid up? And so forth.

That is the tone of his business letters until the end of his life. Living in luxury, he is constantly fighting for more money. He received—and spent—enormous sums in the closing years of his life. And yet the commercial value of his operas in his lifetime was not great. A hint of what they were worth in terms of money in the German provinces is obtained from a document in the Burrell Collection, showing the net profits of the *Ring* operas in Schwerin, during the year 1879. They had gained less than twenty pounds.

What Wagner wanted in the way of luxury was beyond the means of the petty kings of the German states in which he lived; what he attained was far beyond the commercial value of his work and even farther beyond what he had a right to expect. His financial achievements were hardly less remarkable than his musical works. He was, without doubt, the king of borrowers.

CHAPTER V

GENIUS AND REBEL

ARTISTS have not ordinarily been noted for conformity. Every first-rate artist has been a rebel outside the field of his art. That is a necessity of definition, for genuine creation must be more than synthesis. The artist must add something new to the art in which he exercises his genius. And to add something new is to be a revolutionary.

Richard Wagner was a great artist, and like all other great artists he revolutionized the art in which he worked. Harmonization, orchestration, operatic composition and stage technique are all radically different from what they would have been if Wagner had never lived.

But there is a difference between the revolutionary activities of Wagner and those of most other great artists. His rebellion extended into politics. We do find artists mixed with revolutionaries in every upheaval of government—but they are the minor men. The geniuses are too much absorbed in art to interest themselves in political movements. What they

desire is that governments should let them alone to work as they wish.

That is the real secret of Wagner's revolutionary activities. The State did *not* let him alone. Something stood in the way of the fruition of his hopes—he was unable to have *Lohengrin* produced. As he was at that time Kappelmeister at Dresden and it was the Government that would not produce *Lohengrin*, Wagner was all for a new government. For abstract principles of liberty he had no sympathy. He only knew that he was living under a power that refused to stage his opera; with the overturning of that power he expected to see the succession of a government whose chief interest would be opera—or perhaps he only wanted to be revenged on the State that refused him a hearing.

Revolutionaries have a habit of believing that any government will be better than the old. Whatever their particular grudge against the existing state, the new order, they believe, will give its particular attention to the eradication of that one cause of complaint. New governments, unfortunately, have a habit of being much like the old governments with a different set of men in the lucrative positions.

But Wagner was not a profound thinker on political matters; he could see no further than his fellow-revolutionaries. With the overthrow of the Saxon government, he believed, a new State would arise that would be heart and soul for *Lohengrin* and Richard Wagner. So he joined the rebel movement and lost his place as Kappelmeister.

The more important revolutionary in Wagner is the musician who built up what was almost a new art. Wagner's opera was a derivative of the opera that had gone before; but the distance which he spanned was so great as almost to create a new art form. He demanded effects which were then impossible to produce, effects which, indeed, have not yet been produced as he asked for them. The transitions from scene to scene in the *Rhinegold* are still impossible on the operatic stage. There is a medium, however, in which Wagner's exorbitant demands may now be realized.

That is the film. The *Nibelungen Lied* has already been filmed, and the immense difficulties, indeed the insuperable difficulties which Wagner imposed on the stage in demanding the use of animals and the employment of such effects as the ride of the Valkyries at the end

of *Götterdämmerung*, have been overcome. Now the sound film has arrived, and it may be that one day the operas of Wagner will be not unworthily produced by this medium.

In his technique Wagner was so great a revolutionary that the possible medium for his art was not at hand when his work was done.

Other difficulties were more easily bridged. His harmonies, now so familiar, were received at first with horror, even *Tannhäuser* proving too radical an innovation for the first Paris audience that heard it. But they could be, and were, played. Again, to fill out his brass section, Wagner was forced to invent a new instrument, still known as the "Wagner tuba," while he is likewise credited with the production of the wind-machine.

Revolution in art was natural to him. But revolution in politics we must refuse to take seriously.

His first resistance to authority came in his student days, when a group of students ran amok and broke into the houses of a number of persons to smash furniture and generally enjoy an orgy of destruction. Wagner was with them and recounts in his Autobiography his abandonment to the mob-feeling and the

pleasure he experienced in breaking furniture, crockery and windows. This, however, was hardly rebellion; it was rather a manifestation of entirely too high spirits which again found vent, not much later, when hooligans followed the examples of the students and began rioting, whereupon the students were promptly pressed into service to restrain the disorder. They appeared, Wagner with them, to get quite as much pleasure out of acting with the forces of order as with those of disorder, so this can hardly be instanced as an early example of Wagner's revolutionary attitude.

Revolutionary disorders occurring in Dresden about this time moved young Wagner to start the composition of a "political overture," which began with a prelude depicting "dark oppression in the midst of which a strain was at last heard," symbolizing the coming of freedom together with the regency of King Frederick and the establishment of a constitution for Saxony. This rather remarkable source of inspiration may seem to indicate early revolutionary tendencies. As a matter of fact, any other important contemporary event would have been equally likely to elicit something in the form of music from the impressionable

young man, who at that time, was, no doubt, an idealist, as most young men are, and would therefore optimistically expect any change to be for the better.

It is not until we actually reach the time of Wagner's rebellion that we find any more indication of interest in the Government about him, except in so far as it might aid the production of his opera. Then it is a flurry that quickly arises and as quickly subsides.

On February 27, 1843, Wagner was appointed Kappelmeister at the Saxon Court, in Dresden. His first letters to his friend Kietz show no antipathy for the life there. He is far from harbouring revolutionary desires.

Oddly enough, it was a speech that was the very reverse of revolutionary that embroiled Wagner with powerful persons at Court and led him into his temporary rebellious attitude. At a meeting of the Vaterlands Verein Wagner heard a discussion on "Republic or Monarchy" in which the republican idea had rather the better of it. In an article in the *Dresdner Anzeiger* of June 15, 1848, Wagner asked why all the blessings of a republic could not be achieved with a king at the head of the State, and he suggested that no king was better fitted

for the post than the King of Saxony. Little trouble would have arisen from that if he had not made it plain that in that case many of the Court sycophants would have to be eliminated—perhaps because he had recently been annoyed by the opposition some of them opposed to his project of reading *Lohengrin* to the king. This enraged the courtiers, and efforts were made by them to have the king dismiss Wagner; but the king took no action. The flattery in Wagner's article had perhaps found its target.

That this speech caused a difficult situation for Wagner is, however, shown by later correspondence. We begin to see evidence of friction. Shortly after the appearance of the article, we have a letter from Wagner to Reissigar, First Kappelmeister, saying that he is too tired to go to work, even if it involves his dismissal. The unpleasantness to which he was subjected, however, soon drew more violent retorts from him. He proposes an entire reorganization of the theatre at Dresden. His adversaries retort by criticizing the scheme. Wagner enters joyously into the controversy and criticizes the criticism.

However annoying these petty squabbles may

have been (and Wagner certainly took his full part in keeping them going) they hardly seem to account for the development of a revolutionary attitude. But Wagner was an actor and a self-dramatizer. He magnified his vexations into oppressions, and on March 30, 1849, turned out a poem called "Necessity" (unpublished and unknown) which depicted a desperate frame of mind, the requisite mood to enable him to plunge into the revolution which broke out a few weeks later. No doubt this exercise helped him to regard himself as a heroic liberator of his fellow-men—who did not ordinarily occupy a great deal of his thoughts.

Wagner was probably drawn into the excitement of the revolution through the enthusiasm of his friend Roeckel—who later had reason to regret his assistance. Roeckel was likewise a Dresden orchestra leader, and had taken the front rank in the political troubles of the time. He seems to have imbued Wagner with a sort of tingling for excitement not readily distinguishable from the attitude which, earlier in life, sent him out with a group of unruly students to indulge in an orgy of smashing. True, Wagner did little smashing this time. He

simply watched, encouraged the others, and ran away when the six-day revolution failed.

He did at least one thing during the revolution. He had posters printed—to be pasted on the barricades—demanding of the Saxon troops if they were going to join the foreigners (the Prussian soldiers lent to Saxony to put down the rebellion) against their own countrymen. This might have been of some use in corrupting those of the Saxon soldiery who could read—if they had not been put on the wrong side of the barrier, facing the mob, where the ambiguous wording of the poster, which changed its meaning according to which side read it, may have persuaded some of the revolutionaries not to fight against their Saxon brothers in the army, if it had any effect at all. This seems to have been Wagner's total contribution to the cause of liberty—and of revenge for the slight to his opera.

His own story of those few hectic days is couched in quite a heroic light. With the excitement of a romantic servant-girl watching John Gilbert ruin a score of fragile feminine lives, Wagner climbed the Kreuz Tower and looked on. "In order to reach this tower from the Town Hall," he says in his Autobiography,

"one had to pass through a space which was under a cross-fire of rifle shots from the troops posted in the royal palace. At a moment when this square was quite deserted, I yielded to my daring impulse, and crossed it on my way to the Kreuz Tower at a slow pace, remembering that in such circumstances the young soldier is advised never to hurry, because by so doing he may draw the shot upon himself." With admirable *sang froid*, in this position which he lets us know is extremely dangerous, "I lost myself in an earnest philosophical discussion . . . which extended to the widest spheres of religion. . . . The Prussian sharpshooters were posted on the distant tower of the Frauenkirche, and had chosen the height occupied by us as their target." There he remained all night (perhaps he doubted his ability to cross the square slowly enough on the return trip) "close beneath the great bell with its terrible groaning clang, and with accompaniment of the continuous rattle of the Prussian shot as it beat against the tower walls."

One reads this with a shudder and thanks the providence that spared the author of the *Ring* while his work was yet unborn. One does, that is, if one has not read William Wal-

lace's biography, in which the author was unkind enough to discuss the armament of the Prussian troops and the geography of their position and Wagner's. The Prussians were armed with a weapon which carried only four hundred yards and was inaccurate beyond two hundred. Wagner's stand was six hundred yards from the tower of the Frauenkirche. Any rattling that the Prussian shot did on the walls of the Kreuz Tower must, therefore, have been effected by absent treatment.

Meanwhile Minna was throwing up her hands in despair at the light-headed actions of her husband. She sensed the consequences of what appeared to him to be a grandiloquent lark. On Sunday, May 7, she managed to get him out of Dresden, to which he returned the next day. There, others pointed out to him the seriousness of the situation, which agreed so well with Minna's dire prognostications that he gave in at once, and allowed her to spirit him away.

He went first to Weimar, whence a letter dated May 14 (six days, that is, after his flight) shows how little the revolution actually meant to him and how far he was from being a revolutionary. In this letter (which has hitherto

been unpublished) he repudiates revolutionaries as being "unconscionable and destructive." He has done with revolutions and will devote himself to art alone. He does not seem now to be taking quite so exalted an idea of the importance of revolution as in his Autobiography, where he expresses annoyance because Minna "persisted in regarding me as an ill-advised, inconsiderate person who had plunged both myself and her into the most terrible situation." That was exactly what he had done. Not for the sake of a principle but solely out of a grandiloquent desire to see himself a sort of hero, he had sacrificed a Court position with important prospects for exile and poverty. Minna, who had begun to breathe freely in Dresden, after the terrible years of poverty in Riga and Paris, had every reason to be angry at him for thus throwing away his future and hers.

On May 18 he wrote from Weimar to his brother-in-law that he was as safe there as in Abraham's bosom, and that he intended to settle there if he lost his post in Dresden. *If* he lost his post! Nothing could show better his childlike inability to comprehend the inevitable results of his action. He had joined a rebellion to overthrow the Government which employed

him, and he did not even expect the king to deprive him of his position! Minna must have been driven nearly crazy by the necessity of caring for this infant in such dangerous times. However, something brought him to reason overnight, for the next day he writes to Minna, not directly but under cover of another letter, saying that Weimar is getting too hot to hold him and that he is leaving, under the name of Professor Werder.

By stages he reached Zurich, where he was destined to stay for some time. How correctly Minna had estimated the seriousness of his case was seen in the punishment meted out to Roeckel and his confederates. Roeckel, who was convicted on the strength of a letter from Wagner written to him in a transparent code, was sentenced to death, though the sentence was later commuted to thirteen years' imprisonment. Glasenapp, chief official whitewasher of Wagner's follies, says in his official biography that "It was most culpable of Roeckel not to have destroyed it (the letter from Wagner) at once." Evidently, one assumes, because it would have sent Wagner to prison along with his friend, if he had not fled at Minna's instigation. But considering that

it was Roeckel rather than Wagner who paid for the indiscretion with thirteen years of his life, it seems rather unnecessary to allot him, in addition, the blame for an action for which Wagner was certainly equally culpable. He wrote the letter, Roeckel only received it.

With Roeckel tucked safely away in prison, Wagner seems to have had little difficulty in forgetting him. He reports, indeed, his annoyance with Minna, who visited Roeckel in jail and remarked, apparently with sarcastic intent, that prison life did not seem to agree with him. In telling of his release, however, Wagner discovers that his incarceration was really a good thing for him—though he appears to have no regrets that he had not himself awaited sentence and partaken also of the delights of prison.

Letters from Wagner now show how little the revolution meant to him. He has almost forgotten about it. He refers to it casually, and is absorbed again only in his creative plans and in an attempt to conciliate Minna who, now that she has saved her husband, has almost decided to give up this impossible man. Once again it is Wagner, not Minna, who pleads for the resumption of their relations.

There are several letters to Minna describing the various stages of his flight. From Paris we hear about his meeting with Meyerbeer (this is June 4, only a month after the revolution), but the fate of Roeckel and of the rebellion no longer seem to interest him. From Zurich, on June 20, we again hear nothing of the revolution that has driven him into his Swiss exile; he writes only of his plans for a new opera. On July 10 we get the first hint of Minna's reluctance to return and resume once more the life of poverty that she experienced with her husband in Paris. In the same breath in which he complains because she does not want to rejoin him, he sets forth better financial hopes for the future in a plan to sell all his future operas in exchange for a "fixed salary from a very rich music-lover"—Jessie Laussot, as we know now.

Minna allowed herself to be persuaded. Three letters from her, dated July 18, August 3, and August 11, show us the difficulty that existed between this otherwise affectionate couple—the protestations of the Autobiography notwithstanding. He thought she was unfeeling; she thought, in her own words, that he had "gambled recklessly" with their material

position. These letters are unusually interesting, for it is seldom that Minna has a chance to speak for herself. There are two fat volumes of Wagner's letters to Minna, carefully selected and edited; there are no official letters from Minna to Wagner. When Wagner mentions Minna's letters in the Autobiography, as we have already seen, his account of their contents is quite different from what they actually contain.

With Minna reconciled, there remained only the problem of financing her trip to join her husband. This was simplicity itself. Writing instructions for the journey to his wife, Wagner wrote another letter to the long-suffering Liszt, asking him to send Minna the money for the journey. Liszt obliged! Minna arrived and was rewarded for her surrender first by being scolded because her attempt to save Wagner's books from the wreck of his fortunes by entrusting them to a bookseller had been frustrated when they were held for surety for his debts, and secondly by having the pleasure of seeing the Jessie Laussot affair develop.

Wagner's utter insincerity as a revolutionary had by this time been demonstrated to everyone but himself. He continues from time to

time (particularly when his work seems to fail of proper recognition) to speak vaguely of revolution, sometimes for and sometimes against. He also refers occasionally to America, which he likewise looked to in the same frame of mind in which he looked to revolution, on the theory that any change from the conditions which he found irksome would necessarily offer him a greater opportunity to expand his operatic theories.

In 1851 he sighs again for revolution. On July 2 he writes to his friend Kietz saying that he hopes the revolution will begin in Paris. In December he again asks for one—but the lack of sympathy he expresses with the workers who would naturally be the revolutionaries hardly leads one to believe that he would be any more consistent a figure in the new uprising than he was in the old.

> Allow me to refrain (he writes to Kietz) from babbling either of politics or anything like it: all my politics are nothing else than the most sanguinary hatred against the whole of our civilization, contempt for everything arising therefrom, and a longing for nature. . . The fact that I, as a workman, ever gave any

thought to labourers, I now have to repent severely: with all their cries they are the most miserable slaves whom anyone could put in their pocket by just promising them a lot of "work." With us the servile spirit is rooted in everything: the fact that we are human is unknown to anybody in the whole of France (with the exception possibly of Proudhon—and even he is not certain about it!)—however, in the whole of Europe I would prefer the dogs to all these canine humans. Yet I do not despair of a *future*, but it would take a most terrible and destructive revolution to make "human beings" again out of our civilized beasts.

I now think a lot of America! Not that I believe I would find the ideal over there, it only being easier to plant there. . . .

I now intend to commence soon my big Nibelungen trilogy. However, I shall probably not be producing it until on the banks of the Mississippi.

There is a plain enough indication in this letter that Wagner's "sanguinary hatred" for civilization was hardly based on political reasons. What he hated was opposition to the quick

fruition of his plans; and when he speaks of emigrating to America, it is not in search of political freedom but of artistic liberty. Once, indeed, speaking of America, as he does several times in his Autobiography, he mentions a wish to go there and forget artistic pursuits. We may conjecture that in this case he was rather voicing exasperation with his lack of success, which was always behind his thoughts of change and revolution, than considering seriously the abandonment of the plans which he had so long before outlined in one of his first letters to Minna. Those plans did not include a visit to the "South American free states," a term which Wagner evidently used for the southern part of the United States, judging from a reference to Maryland, and they remained always a nebulous land of refuge, which he could conjure up in his mind when he had need of an escape, but which he would undoubtedly have found very disappointing if he had actually gone there.

In 1856 we find Wagner giving a thought to his old companion in rebellion, Roeckel. He writes to a friend asking that a copy of Schopenhauer be sent to Roeckel in jail. Wagner had acquired tremendous enthusiasm for the

German philosopher, and he was always insistent that his friends should share his opinions. Roeckel's situation put him in an excellent position for minute study of pessimistic philosophy, so Wagner's gift cannot be considered other than appropriate.

From the time when Wagner was obliged to flee from Germany, Minna had left no stone unturned to obtain his pardon. Until that was achieved, it would be impossible for the composer to return to his native land, where his photograph appeared in the register of wanted criminals. The first record of her activities that appears in the Burrell Collection is dated April 20, 1855, and is a letter from a gentleman in Dresden, to whom Minna had appealed for help. He writes that it is impossible to obtain a pardon for Wagner. But Minna refused to accept this answer, and after long efforts she was successful. That is an interesting point to remember, when supporters of the Bayreuth tradition argue that Wagner was never great until the days of Bayreuth. For Bayreuth could not have been established in any country but Germany; and but for Minna's unremitting efforts he could never have returned to Germany.

Minna must have been indeed a level-headed woman not to allow herself to be dissuaded by pique from this attempt to restore her husband to his native land. She was working to that end while still smarting from the sting of the Jessie Laussot affair, of which she had full knowledge, though Wagner believed she was entirely in the dark. The next results of her constant appeals to persons of influence in Germany are indicated in letters written to her by Wagner from Venice, where he had gone at the end of the Wesendonck affair. In one letter (and he was able to write very affectionately during a period usually painted as one of complete estrangement) he says that he hopes to be permitted to return to Germany the following year—which would be 1859. In another, he tells her that the Grand Duke (of Saxe-Weimar?) is making efforts to permit his return to Germany. He had hoped to see his country again at the opening of 1859; but perhaps his own stiff-necked attitude militated against his reception, for, on February 15 of that year, still being in Venice, he writes that he will not submit to any trial in Germany. "If that hard-hearted pedant whom you call your king," he says impolitely, "cannot follow the example

of Baden, Austria, and even Russia, Germany will never see me again." The hard-hearted pedant was not mollified by these words, and Wagner's thoughts turned again to America, more practically this time, for he had received an offer to go to New York, and had even had some correspondence about it. But he was working on the score of *Tristan*, a circumstance which was probably the reason for his lack of interest in an opportunity that he would, in certain moods, have seized gladly.

It was another three years before the pardon was actually granted. Through Minna's constant efforts, Wagner was permitted to petition the King of Saxony for a pardon in March, 1862. On March 25, Wagner sent to Minna his letter for the King, and the pardon was granted.

That date is significant, as indicative of a largeness of character that Minna's enemies have never granted her. We have seen how Wagner could be petty—about money particularly. Minna was the truly magnanimous member of the family, though Wagner's letters and Autobiography would never lead one to believe it. Richard and Minna were finally and definitely separated in 1862. Cosima had

supplanted her. She was to see her husband only once more in her life. From the loneliness of her desertion she finished the task which she had been pressing to completion through many years of bitter disillusion. Her husband had thrown her aside; and she took her revenge by procuring for him the precious permission to return to his native land, where his glory might be recognized and the credit for it be given to another woman.

This is the last we heard of Wagner as a revolutionary. At Bayreuth he became king. He was the most absolute of monarchs. In his Court he tolerated not the slightest divergence from his wishes, the slightest disagreement with his opinions. All rebels were punished with exile and vituperation. No pardons were issued.

CHAPTER VI

"FALSE, DEVASTATING CREATURE!"

AMONG the biographers whose servile obedience to the Bayreuth tradition has made them notorious in the eyes of those who want to know the real Richard Wagner rather than the plaster image his family has installed in his place, is Mr. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who married Eva Wagner and became Cosima's son-in-law. Mr. Chamberlain produced a large and eulogistic book on the life of the Master; on page 65 of that book is the only reference in the entire work to the first major affair in Wagner's life after his marriage—and this is what it says: "A lady *personally unknown to Wagner*, Madame Laussot, the wife of a French merchant, possessed the means of rendering him more substantial assistance. She was English born (Miss Taylor), and during a long stay in Dresden she had acquired an enthusiastic admiration for Wagner's works."

These two sentences, inserted casually in a paragraph on Wagner's various benefactors, comprise Mr. Chamberlain's only contribution

to the story of the affair which, in 1850, almost caused the break-up of Wagner's household. It is significant of the suppression and distortion which veil the life of Wagner. Since the publication of Mr. Chamberlain's work we have had more accurate information concerning Jessie Laussot, though by no means the whole story. There is a partial telling of it in the Autobiography, though how far that account differs from the truth we shall see in a moment. Perhaps that, too, would have been suppressed had it not been for Mrs. Burrell.

Hitherto we have suggested that it was the intention of the trustees of Wagner's reputation to destroy the privately printed copies of his Autobiography as soon as the authorized edition was ready. Writing in the Berlin *Vossische Zeitung* for May 26, 1929, in an article commenting on the discovery of the Burrell Collection, Ludwig Karpath, who was in a position to know what was going on at Bayreuth at the time he mentions, said:

> Before this work (the Autobiography) was published (in 1911) efforts were made in Wahnfried to recover again the few private impressions and in the course of the year

this was fully carried out, except for this one copy which was not procurable. (The copy in the Burrell Collection.)

It can be assumed that the single private copy is the one in the London jewel-box. But it is totally out of the question that it should contain anything not in the Autobiography to be bought in any copy. This copy has value only as a rarity.

The fact that Wahnfried had not intended to permit comparison between the orignal "Mein Leben" and the authorized edition is thus established. Herr Karpath's immediate denial of any difference between the two copies—a denial which is in tune with the unblushing effrontery of the Bayreuth group—is particularly astonishing, in view of the fact that divergences had already been reported by persons who had heard parts of "Mein Leben" read by Wagner —Lilli Lehmann, for one—and had missed those parts when it was published. Except for the added section, however, the published edition does not vary greatly from the original. Perhaps Mrs. Burrell may be given credit for that.

Mrs. Burrell's book, comprising as much of

the biography of Wagner as she had finished at the time of her death, was published in 1898. It contained a facsimile picture of her copy of "Mein Leben." Thus Wahnfried knew that one of the precious copies had slipped out of safe keeping. Further hints of the material fatal to the Bayreuth tradition in Mrs. Burrell's collection were given in the books of Julius Kapp, who was in communication with Mrs. Burrell, and who mentions some of the letters in her collection, though the fact that he was never in possession of them may be deduced from his neglecting to print them. This anticipation of possible confutation must have restrained Wahnfried from taking too great liberties with the Autobiography. The name of Jessie Laussot might have been expunged entirely from the record of Wagner's life if Wahnfried had not feared later exposure, for until the biography and letters were published the world was in the same lamentable state of darkness as Mr. Chamberlain in respect to this business. Wahnfried, therefore, seems to have compromised; distortion of the facts, which would permit some sort of defence if the accusing letters and original Autobiography ever turned up, was considered a stronger posi-

tion than entire suppression, which would have been utterly indefensible.

Perhaps Wahnfried hoped that the Burrell material had been lost, for, after 1898, nothing was heard of it. That may have accounted for the addition to the Autobiography of a fourth section, without explanation as to its authorship. If the accusing original copy never appeared, nothing need be said. If it should appear, the defence could then be made that Wagner himself added that section later—despite the negative evidence of an entire absence of reference to it in his voluminous letters. It would be very difficult, indeed, to prove that Wagner did not write the suspected fourth section, but the gratuitous withholding of any information regarding it, on the apparent assumption that no one would know it had not appeared in the original edition, is in itself a highly suspicious circumstance. There is internal evidence as well, to disprove its authenticity; that we will come to later.

We are, then, perhaps indebted to Mrs. Burrell for the appearance of Jessie Laussot in the Autobiography, and consequently for the accounts that a number of students have succeeded in piecing together concerning her re-

lations with Wagner. We will find one story in Wagner's Autobiography, another in his letters (for Wahnfried's editing was not always able to cover up discrepancies, particularly when readers were in possession of more information than the editors wanted them to have), and a third in the documents of the Burrell Collection.

Wagner's taste was evidently very good. We find him usually enamoured of exceptional women. Minna was an unusual woman, as we shall see particularly in connexion with this affair. So was Mathilde Wesendonck, and so was Cosima von Bülow, whose strong personality and whose influence on those about her succeeded in establishing and maintaining her own version of Wagner's life as the authentic one, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Jessie Laussot was, like these others, an extraordinary woman. Minna had the consolation of knowing that her husband's wanderings from her side were to women who were in some respects as worthy of admiration as herself.

Ernest Newman, who gives as excellent an account of the Laussot affair as was possible with the evidence then at his disposal, describes her thus: "She was more than ordinarily intelli-

gent, and Wagner himself testifies to her ability as musician and pianist. She had literary and philosophical as well as musical interests. Some years after the Wagner affair she separated from Laussot and married, in 1879, the celebrated historian, Karl Hillebrand. She settled in Florence, where she founded and conducted an *a cappella* choir and took a leading part generally in the musical life of the town. Liszt dedicated twelve of his choral works to her. Under the pseudonym of Aldobrandini, she wrote in Italian a treatise on music; and she translated into English, in 1888, Schopenhauer's 'Four-fold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.' "

Little as we shall find about Jessie in the Autobiography, there is even less in the official biography of Wagner, the tremendous work of Glasenapp. He ignores the Laussot episode altogether. Wagner was, perhaps, too anxious to offer a complete justification for his sins to realize that in some cases he might more readily simply suppress an entire chapter of his life, provided that chapter were not too well known. Glasenapp suppressed; and since Glasenapp was the official interpreter and apologist for Wahnfried, we feel even surer that this story would

have been cut from the Autobiography, too, if the knowledge of the possible existence of Mrs. Burrell's copy had not frightened its editors.

Mr. William Ashton Ellis, one of the Bayreuth supporters, whose voluminous translations from Wagner and Wagner commentators are couched in a style that reminds one of a fussy old maid turning ecstatically to the manufacture of literature and achieving only preciousness, translated Glasenapp, and added much material on his own account. The result of this collaboration was six tremendous tomes on the life of Wagner, covering his life to the year 1859 apparently with the most minute attention. In this tremendous marshalling of affected phrases there are just two references to Jessie Laussot. The first explains in parenthesis that a letter of Liszt's just quoted was written to Mme. Laussot; the second reference is simply the statement that a certain letter of Liszt's was written to her. From this tremendously detailed account of Wagner, written under the direction of Bayreuth, with the letters, the then unpublished Autobiography, and the testimony of Wagner's friends and family all available, we emerge without even the knowledge that Jessie and Wagner knew

each other! Without even the knowledge of her first name! For, even in the Index, she appears chastely as Mme. Laussot. No reader of that book would ever remember her name. She figures in it as one of the several million persons who happened to be living in Europe about the same time as—not Richard Wagner, but Franz Liszt! If there were no other evidence as to the untrustworthiness of the Bayreuth tradition this one deliberate omission in itself should make us distrust every shred of matter that bears the imprint of Wahnfried.

Note one thing, before we proceed further. Jessie was fourteen years younger than Wagner; she was about twenty-one, he was about thirty-five, Minna was about thirty-nine when this episode occurred. We shall find Wagner's attention wandering always in the direction of younger women, until he finally marries for the second time, a woman twenty-five years his junior. Wagner's account of his loves makes them highly spiritual, ethereal and far from physical amours. A comparison of the ages of the actors leads us to the suspicion that he, like most other men, was attracted by nothing less tangible than youth.

Wagner's first meeting with Jessie Laussot

occurred in 1848, the year before his disastrous experience as an amateur revolutionary. He describes it thus in his Autobiography:

> About this time a young Englishwoman, Madame Jessie Laussot, who had married a Frenchman in Bordeaux, one day presented herself at my house in the company of Karl Ritter . . . This young man . . . was a member of one of those northern families who had settled down permanently in Dresden. . . . I remembered that I had seen him once before not long after the first performance of *Tannhäuser*, when he had asked me for my autograph for a copy of the score of that opera, which was on sale at the music shop. I now learned that this copy really belonged to Frau Laussot, who had been present at those performances, and who was now introduced to me. Overcome with shyness, *the young woman expressed her admiration in a way I had never experienced before*, and at the same time told me how great was her regret at being called away by family affairs from her favourite home in Dresden with the Ritter family, who, she gave me to understand, were deeply devoted to me. *It*

was with a strange, and in its way quite a new, sensation that I bade farewell to this young lady.

Attention is called to our italicized phrases, for, what they say may mean much or little. This peculiar vagueness is an exasperating trick of Wagner's all the way through his Autobiography; but it is revealing, in that it crops up wherever he has something to conceal. A passage like this is immediately pounced upon by the student familiar with the peculiar mannerisms of the Autobiography as concealing more than it reveals.

Perhaps it was for the sake of Karl Ritter himself, or perhaps it was in order not to lose complete touch with Jessie, that Wagner immediately invited the young man to come and see him and accompany him on his long walks. The revolution and his flight intervened before his next meeting with Jessie; but in the meantime he had become very friendly with the Ritters—so friendly that he addressed Frau Ritter as "Mother" when he wrote to her. Wishing to help him out of his difficulties after the revolution, the Ritters arranged with the Laussots (Jessie apparently had guarded for

over eighteen months the memory of having thanked Wagner in a way he had never experienced before, whatever that phrase may have meant) to make him an allowance. Jessie's mother, Mrs. Taylor, was a wealthy woman, well able to help the composer.

The part which Mrs. Taylor plays in this affair is rather enigmatic. She arranged the marriage of her daughter with Eugène Laussot, a Bordeaux wine-merchant. Jessie was apparently not happy with him, and it has even been suggested that Mrs. Taylor was her son-in-law's lover! Incredible as this may seem, it would explain Mrs. Taylor's willingness to support Wagner as a sort of sop to Jessie for the theft of her husband; nor would this be inconsistent with the dénouement of the affair, as we shall see later.

From the Autobiography, and from Wagner's letters, we should never have guessed that the offer to make Wagner an allowance had not come spontaneously from the Laussots, then living at Bordeaux, at the suggestion of the Ritters. He does not breathe a word of having seen Jessie; biographers have always believed that an invitation came to Wagner from Bordeaux to visit the Laussots some little time after

he had been informed that they were willing to help him.

As a matter of fact, Wagner met Jessie in Paris! This is unknown to his biographers, and it explains his subsequent visit and the apparent speed with which he decided to leave his wife and elope with Jessie. His affair with her did not begin in April, 1850, at Bordeaux; it began in February, at Paris. In a letter to Liszt, dated February 6, now in the Burrell Collection, Wagner speaks of meeting Jessie in Paris. He was in a ripe mood to fall before the charms of a woman younger than his wife. There had been considerable estrangement between Minna and himself over the revolutionary episode, and it had only been by dint of frantic arguments that he had succeeded in making her agree to remain with him. Still smarting from this disagreement, and separated from his wife, he met the charming young Englishwoman. Their romance must have begun in Paris. It was not as a friend, but already as Jessie's lover, that Wagner went to Bordeaux, to continue his relations with her in her husband's house.

From further evidence in the Burrell Collection we may feel sure that Wagner was more

than a casual friend to Jessie. After meeting her in Paris, he had his portrait done by Kietz, and sent it to Jessie. A daguerreotype of the portrait, and Jessie's letter from Bordeaux thanking him for it, are in the Burrell Collection. It is too much to expect us to believe that Wagner took the trouble of sitting for his portrait in order to make a present of it to a young lady whom he had met casually for the second time in his life. Only one hypothesis other than that the Laussot affair began in Paris can be admitted, and that is, that it began in Dresden, eighteen months before.

Wagner's explanation in "Mein Leben" as to the manner in which he happened to go to Bordeaux says nothing about meeting Jessie in Paris. He has already spoken about aid from the Ritters and probable aid from the Laussots; in the light of the Burrell Collection it is reasonable to suggest that this giving of aid has all been dated forward by references in the Autobiography and the letters, for apparently there was no question of help for Wagner from the Laussots until *after* he had gone to Bordeaux.

I was called upon to answer another inquiry as to the state of my health from Mme.

> Laussot in Bordeaux, (Wagner writes). It turned out that my answer prompted her to send me a kind and pressing invitation to go and stay at her house, at least for a short time, to rest and forget my troubles. . . . I was received with great courtesy and cordiality by the young wine merchant, Eugène Laussot, and presented to my sympathetic young friend, his wife.

Wagner has not ordinarily been credited with a sense of humour, but this touch about being presented to Jessie—who had just left him in Paris, and for whom he had had his portrait painted—is too good to have been done seriously.

In the published letters of Richard Wagner we have a letter to Minna dated from Paris, March 2, 1850, singing the praises of Jessie Laussot. This was before Wagner's visit to Bordeaux; hence it has been taken as an expression of Wagner's gratitude for an offer of help—an offer made *before* the two were well acquainted. We know now that that letter was written *after* Wagner had met Jessie in Paris; and Minna, who knew her husband well, may have realized that his ecstasy was not dependent

on a promise of monetary help alone. That may have accounted for her own failure to thrill at the news of the gift. Minna was never able to reconcile herself to the spectacle of her husband playing the rôle of *gigolo*.

Did Wahnfried know about the Paris meeting? A negative answer would hardly seem credible. But no reference to this encounter will be found in any of Wagner's published letters. Those to Liszt skip conveniently from December 5, 1849 to April 21, 1850, the latter referring to his "intended journey to Greece" which "has come to nothing." Only one of the *Family Letters* falls within this period; in it he says that he is going "far away." Jessie Laussot is mentioned in neither of these letters, though it was with her that he had planned to go away. We hear of her first in that eulogistic letter to Minna.

> No one could possibly act more kindly, more nobly, more delicately than our friend, Mme. Laussot! (Wagner explodes). I should have thought, dear wife, that it would have really uplifted you to see what a deep impression your husband's work can make on wholesome, unperverted, noble

hearts; to see that he is able to influence them to make such sacrifices because of their warm sympathy! Can you find it in your heart to despise such a success of my art—*for that alone* has brought this about—or even to rate it lower than the so-called "brilliant" successes attained to-day by speculation and trickery from the stupid, slovenly, heartless majority of the great theatre-going public? You see now the real nature of these cowardly, slack, people, who once seemed well enough pleased with me, and how despicably they have behaved towards me. Are we to despise these people and yet think only of money? Good, then here is money, as much as we need to live in peace and comfort, money, too, not juggled out of the pockets of the stingy crowd, but offered to me in the most delicate fashion by a noble heart out of joy in my works, just as I make them out of my true innermost nature! What more do you want?

The italics in the letter above are Wagner's own; but they are placed, oddly enough, in the precise spot where a critic of the truth of this letter might have put them. Wagner appar-

ently feared that Minna would believe it was not for his music alone that money had been offered him. He had a guilty conscience.

Perhaps it was on account of that conscience that he got Jessie to write to Minna. Both her letter and Minna's reply have disappeared (Wahnfried's policy generally allows only Wagner to speak, the letters of others probably being less amenable to distortion than his), but Wagner's letter of the 13th of March lets us know that these letters once existed.

> Will you be cross with me (he writes his wife), if I tell you I have suddenly decided at last to accept the very pressing and cordial invitations of my friends in Bordeaux—they have even sent me my travelling expenses—and that I accordingly set out to-morrow morning for Bordeaux? . . . Frau Laussot is doing all she is doing for me, just so that I need do *nothing* against my nature and inmost inclination, to save me from quite useless and fruitless annoyance here. And, just think, she and Frau Ritter *quite alone* offer us a yearly income—no one else is to have any claims made upon them. You

should but know this lady's happiness, after receipt of your letters, at being able to hope she has quite reassured yourself as well. . . . Her husband also speaks and writes German quite fluently, so that we all—for her mother is at Bordeaux too—shall be able to converse without impediment. I confess it rejoices me greatly to think that I shall be bringing into the life of this remarkably amiable family so rare a diversion—as far as my powers permit—as the playing and singing them something from *Lohengrin*.

The diversion he brought into their family was rather in the nature of Tristan than of Lohengrin, with M. Laussot cast for King Mark. That was Wagner's favourite rôle for other women's husbands. The secret of the creation of that most obliging of husbands we shall find when we get to the Wesendonck affair. Wagner was writing *Tristan* while he was trying to win Mathilde from her husband. Otto Wesendonck was King Mark—or at least King Mark represented the rôle that Wagner had prepared for him to play. Later on, von Bülow, who may have been influenced by the philosophy of this opera, played the part of his

own free will by giving up Isolde-Cosima to Tristan-Wagner.

On either the 17th or the 19th of March, Wagner writes to Minna:

> Here in Bordeaux, where I arrived last Saturday (the 16th) I am bound to feel almost in heaven, compared with Paris; you can form no idea of the kindness and devotion of this family! It consists of the young married couple and the wife's mother, an Englishwoman who—equally with her husband, who was educated at the Plocjmann Institute in Dresden—speaks German as well as ourselves. Moreover, there is a whole colony of Germans here, rich families all, and all of them honour me highly. What else shall I say to you, than that it certainly is very good for me to have become personally acquainted in this fashion with the dear souls who have no higher ambition now than to make myself and my good, sore-tried, and faithful wife as happy as ever they're able? It is a rare and unheard-of good fortune that has come my way. The young husband, a most charmingly sociable fellow,

showed a quite indescribable delight when he saw me arrive; my works are known here to their last note. . . . On one point, however, I've much ado; as soon as my host heard that nothing had come of my overture for the end of March, they naturally importuned me to stay here longer. But I explained to them that I should have to help you in the moving, and—honestly—in spite of all the joy I'm tasting now, my whole heart is yearning to be back at home with you! Believe me, I know no other happiness than to be able to live contentedly and tranquilly beside you in our own little domicile.

He managed, however, to defer this happiness for some considerable time. Some light on his obstinacy in clinging to the comparative misery of existence with his Bordeaux friends may be gleaned from a letter written to Frau Ritter, only a few days after that in which he informed Minna that his only happiness was with her. "I have at last come to know our friend Jessie Laussot," he writes, "and the knowledge has awakened in me an irrepressible longing to have the joy of knowing equally

clearly and perfectly you and all who belong to her." So keen is his desire to know "equally clearly and perfectly" all of Jessie's friends that he issues to Frau Ritter an invitation to come and live with him.

> My heart rejoices in you (he confides) and yet you and yours are still only a picture to me and it is a real torment to me that the colours of this picture change and melt indistinctly into one another. I can hold nothing fast except the entrancing consciousness of being dear to you. Blessed as this feeling is, it is not yet free from pain, for the gulf of separation yawns between us. *It is impossible that you should love only the artist in me, just as it is impossible for me to honour only my benefactor in you.* There is a bond between us which holds only because we love each other as *persons.* We must see each other face to face, take each other by the hand, dwell together, not simply rejoice in each other at large, but have a share in every incident of each other's lives, sad and joyful, tearful and merry—as life must be. . . . *Come to me in glorious Switzerland.*

There have been many conjectures as to the reason why Jessie broke with Wagner. Most of them have suggested that Minna in some way interfered, perhaps by showing Jessie a letter in which he speaks to his wife of returning to her at the same time that he was planning to elope with Jessie. The hypothesis has never been put forward that Frau Ritter put a spoke in the wheel—but if she had shown this letter to Jessie that would certainly have done the trick.

How soon Minna knew what was going on between her husband and Jessie it is impossible to say. We know that she had received letters telling her of the conduct of her husband, for *nine years after* the affair Wagner discovered for the first time that his wife had known all about it. We discover this from a letter to her in which he sings her praises for her forbearance. It is a fact that speaks volumes in praise of Minna. In the Burrell Collection there is a letter (charming and apparently frank) from Jessie to Minna dated April 7, 1850—that is, while Wagner was with Jessie in Bordeaux. Across that letter Minna has written the words, "False, devastating creature!" But whether those words were written when the letter was

received or were added later we cannot tell.

Apparently Minna complained, for there is a long self-pitying letter from Wagner, dated April 17, written rather for posterity than for Minna, in which he reproves her for asking him to use the regular form of the second person instead of the familiar form in addressing her. In this letter he reviews the whole course of their marriage, and explains, with great eloquence, that Minna has always been a drag upon him. This letter is Exhibit A in the case against Minna.

And here the Burrell Collection reveals once more the perfidy of Wahnfried. According to the Autobiography, Wagner announced to Minna in this letter that he would no longer live with her. Yet, in as much of the letter as we are permitted to see (a letter so important that no conscientious biographers could have withheld it) he never says this definitely. The nearest he comes to it is in the last sentences we get before the close of the letter, which has been suppressed. "Your letter has now wrecked everything," he says. "There you stand before me—irreconcilable. . . . What can *my* love be now? Only the wish to repay you for your youth wasted on me, for the

misery you suffered with me, to make you *happy*. Can I hope to attain this now by *living with you?* Impossible." Dinger says that the suppressed close of this letter read, "You will not see me again. I am going to the East with Jessie Laussot." We know that that is incorrect not only by the evidence of subsequent letters, but by that letter of nine years later, when Wagner was surprised to learn that Minna had known of his plans.

It was not in that letter at all that Wagner announced to Minna that he was leaving her. It was in a letter dated the 16th of April, now in the Burrell Collection, in which he sets forth a long list of his grievances and tells Minna that he is leaving her—without giving his reason, which is Jessie.

Knowing this, a great deal becomes clear. Why did Minna write telling him no longer to use the familiar form of address to her? It was because he had already announced to her their separation. The letter of the 17th has been misdated. It belongs to a later date—probably about the 1st of May. This explains the opening of a letter written on the 4th of May, evidently before Minna had had time to answer the one erroneously dated the 17th of

April. He begins, "I cannot help writing to you once more," which implies that this letter followed the other one closely, and then he tells her that he has some "news to impart to-day that formed my very special reason for writing you again, since I have a feeling as if it must soften for you all the possible bitterness of our separation." The news which he thought would comfort Minna for the loss of her husband was to the effect that he had found somebody to pay the necessary expenses for him to leave her. Minna was probably able to guess pretty accurately who that someone was. "I am on the point of starting for Marseilles," he says, "whence I shall take an English boat to Malta, and thence go on to Greece and Asia Minor. I have always felt . . . the need of issuing from this narrow life of books . . ." and so on in a vague explanation that in his search for true art he had "conceived the plan of a journey to Greece and the East, and am lucky enough to see the means of executing it now placed at my disposal from London. For in London I have gained a new protector, one of the most eminent English lawyers, who knows my works, and in return for a certain obligation—the assignment to him of the

original manuscript of everything I write in the future—will accord me his support."

This English lawyer was, of course, Jessie Laussot. In a letter to Kietz, written the same day, he tells him, also, that he is going away, "means having suddenly been provided from London." He had written earlier to Kietz (April 25) in his most dramatic vein asking him to keep his letters for him; he was going away, no one must know where. "My destination is loneliness." Wagner was a great hand at seeking loneliness; but he always wanted a companionable young lady to be lonely with him.

Kietz, whose fondness for Minna seems to have been at least as great as it was for Wagner, sent her the letter of May 4. Minna already had her own tidings, so she left Zurich to find out what in the world her husband was about.

Wagner had left Bordeaux, having, apparently, failed to make Jessie see things his way; but after he had returned to Paris, she wrote to him agreeing to go away with him. Evidently, from the evidence of these two letters, that had happened by May 4. But in an attempt to excuse his conduct, Wagner puts the date of Jessie's acceptance forward, and makes

it coincide with Minna's arrival in Paris, which gives him some slight excuse for a shabby trick he played on Minna. He leaves Paris hastily, telling Kietz to explain to Minna that he doesn't know where her husband has gone, and later writes to her saying that he didn't know it was she who was looking for him—a statement which he contradicts himself in his Autobiography. Minna returns to Zurich, in an emotional state that can easily be imagined.

All this time, it appears, Mrs. Taylor was ignorant of the progress of her daughter's affairs, for, on May 8, she writes to Minna saying that she has decided to give Wagner an allowance of 2500 francs per year for two years from April 1, 1850. She asks where to send the first instalment. The date at which this arrangement begins is interesting; for it shows that the aid from the Laussots did not, as Wagner tells us, come before he had met them, but after he had gone to Bordeaux!

But the dénouement of the affair was approaching rapidly. Just exactly what happened it is impossible to say. Jessie apparently repented her choice; with praiseworthy impartiality, Wagner accused Minna, Mrs. Taylor, and M. Laussot of conspiring against

him and lying to Jessie. It seems probable, however, that Minna had nothing to do with it, though she might be excused if, as was conjectured, she had forwarded to Jessie Wagner's letter of May 4, in which he ended by holding out to her a hope of his return—an idea which could hardly have been congenial to Jessie. But there were plenty of other chances for the whole matter to blow up. There was, for instance, the letter to Frau Ritter, quoted above, which Jessie is even more likely to have seen.

What probably happened was that Jessie's mother interfered. Jessie appears to have told her what was going on. Whether Mrs. Taylor was playing a perfectly disinterested rôle, or whether she was winking at the Wagner affair to hide her own misdeeds with Jessie's husband, the idea of her daughter going away with Wagner would hardly be to her taste.

She had only to cut off the allowance on which Wagner was counting to enable him to decamp, and the whole affair would have been necessarily at an end.

Wagner himself tells us that Jessie had informed her mother of her intentions, and that she had communicated then to M. Laussot,

"who vowed he would search everywhere for me in order to put a bullet through my head." With his customary impudence, Wagner wrote to the husband "endeavouring to make him see matters in their true light," and adding a gratuitous insult by declaring himself "incapable of understanding how a man could bring himself to keep a woman with him by force, when she no longer wished to remain." Wagner was thoughtless enough to add that he was coming with such speed to Bordeaux to have an understanding, that he was not even waiting to have his passport visaed. This gave M. Laussot an excellent idea for getting rid of Wagner without a scene. He simply put the matter before the police, who ordered Wagner out of the town on the grounds of his irregular papers, without concealing the fact that the action was being taken at the request of M. Laussot.

Before going, however, Wagner composed a letter which is unfortunately lost. It must have been one of his finest outpourings of indignation. He told Jessie what had taken place "without concealing my contempt at the behaviour of her husband, who could expose his wife's honour by a denunciation to the police!"

To deliver this letter, Wagner tells us that he went to Jessie's house, and rang the bell, whereupon the door "sprang open." Without pausing to remark this extraordinary conduct on the part of the door, Wagner entered the house, "walked up to the first floor flat, the door of which stood open, and went from room to room till I reached Jessie's boudoir, where I placed my letter in her workbasket and returned the way I had come." Julius Kapp suggests dryly that he must have been wearing the Tarnhelm.

Wagner went off to forget his sorrow in the mountains, accompanied by his friend Karl Ritter. "Suddenly the peaceful state I had scarcely yet entered upon was disturbed by a letter which Karl received from Mme. Laussot. He did not know whether he ought to show it to me, as he thought Jessie had gone mad. I tore it out of his hand, and found she had written to say that she felt obliged to let my friend know that she had been sufficiently enlightened about me to make her drop my acquaintance entirely." He and Karl agreed that "with such a mad Englishwoman nothing could be done," and the episode was over.

This account from the Autobiography, how-

ever, is not exactly in accord with the story in the letters. Wagner's trip to Bordeaux is announced in a letter to Frau Ritter, dated May 11: "I must summon up the failing powers of my sick body to go with all speed to Bordeaux, not to see Jessie but Eugène (Laussot). Think of me as a dying man, for either a speedy death awaits me—or a new life." Unfortunately for his attitudinizing he was denied both the glory of a violent death and the success of his hopes. On the 9th of June he writes from Switzerland, where he is engaged in recuperating:

> Dear Mother,
>
> Here am I alone again and happiness has flown away like a dream! Hope remains to me—but I am hardly young enough now to live on hope! . . . In a year . . . I hope to see Jessie once more. In a year! God in Heaven! Have we not all experience enough already to know what a year means?

Evidently Jessie had agreed not to see Wagner for a year. Then she decided not to see him at all, and wrote the letter of which we have already spoken. In a later letter to Frau

Ritter, Wagner says: "Five days ago Karl received a letter from Bordeaux in which Jessie told him, very much in brief, that she meant to break with the immediate past and would throw in the fire unread any letters in my handwriting. He was to burn these lines of hers at once and just tell me shortly their main contents." Thereupon he launches upon a highly coloured account of the whole affair, with occasional elegies on Jessie's weakness. "The woman to whom we sought to bring deliverance has proved herself a child! Forgive me—but I can only find her pitiable!" is one sample. Knowing the facts of the case as we do, it is an amusing letter, but it is too long to reproduce, particularly as we have a more amusing and an unpublished letter—Wagner's explanation of the affair to Minna.

He was alone again now, and so, having failed to trap a younger woman and an income, he decided to return to the wife who had struggled so long to keep him in comfort. She had returned quietly to Zurich, where she awaited the turn of events. But she was not immune from the unpleasant repercussions of the affair, for in a letter to Kietz of June 12, she tells him of anonymous letters she has been receiving.

"Oh, this Richard!" she cries, "if I could be sure there was a God of Justice, it would be a great consolation to me." But bitter as this cry was, when, on the same day, she received a proposal of marriage from an admirer in Dresden, who knew how matters were going, she preferred to await the return of her husband.

He returned, writing airily to Kietz that his "wife's love had overcome her suspicions," which was certainly an excellent way of putting it. But before he returned, he paved the way by writing to her (believing her in ignorance of the entire affair, except for a few vague rumours) an account of the business, which gives us a most remarkable insight into his character. He achieves the feat of beginning in self-justification, and finishing by forgiving his wife! Unpublished and unknown, this letter must now take its place as one of the most important pieces of Wagneriana in existence. It is dated from Paris, and addressed to Minna in Zurich:

> My Poor, Dear Wife,
>
> Karl arrived only last night and brought me your letter. Having read it I need hardly first have to assure you that *at all*

hazards, I shall be returning to you, which will be in the next few days; I only add as well to this assurance that already in the early part of May, when I heard in Geneva of your journey to Paris [he pretended, of course, that he had not deliberately fled from her, though he admitted it in his Autobiography] and learned of your endeavour to look me up, I should not have concealed myself from you any more and would even have afforded you an opportunity of speaking to me if *at the time*—and *just at that time and not before*—[as usual when he is particularly emphatic, he is lying] I did not have to show consideration to another person, making it impossible for me for a time to act frankly, and in accordance with the promptings of my heart, ever so concerned about you, as would have been most desirable to me. As from various signs I must inevitably assume that you have received a most distorted report of recent occurrences, nothing was nearer to my heart than to enlighten you as to the true course of events, less for the sake of my own vindication than to relieve you of the deep wrong and grievance which must have been occasioned you by the

abominable false accounts. . . . From your letter I am now able to see that my fears were justified, that you placed implicit credence in the most foolish distortions of the truth by a mother concerned with the forms of propriety and by a vindictive and cowardly husband, damning me therefore as fully guilty—yet yearn for nothing more ardently than my return to you because, separated from me, you believe that death approaches. Though it is clear to me that you are in most great error not only in this respect but with regard to me in general, at the same time I see, nevertheless, that your love for me is stronger and greater than all your fault—and this alone suffices to determine me absolutely as to the course I now have to adopt. I *never* said I did not love you any more, and now I know only that I have still to come to you. Too deeply however, dear Minna, are you in error as to everything that has occurred as well as in regard to our mutual relationship as a whole to permit me to leave it for verbal discussion to enlighten you as to the facts. . . .

First of all you are completely in error in connecting my last deciding letter from

Paris with occurrences in that family which only after that letter had an actual influence on my actions. I hear that you base your error on what appears to you a big discrepancy in the contents of my last letter from Bordeaux and that Paris letter. [Between, that is, the letter in which he spoke of his happiness with Minna and the other when he announced he was leaving her; Minna rightly refused to believe that this sudden change of heart occurred for any other reason than his affair with Jessie]. . . .

After I had tried everything to bring you into comprehending accord with my views on life and art . . . after I, purely in my anxiety for your peace of mind, persuaded that young woman to write you as she did, and after you showed me your joy in this letter, and you really copied and sent her the reply drafted by me—in the sense, as I fancy, you would yourself have written—I at last believed the deep vital discord existing between us was dissolved, and looked forward to a happy future at your side, and expressed to you this feeling and this hope in my first letter from Bordeaux. [It is a trusting picture we have of Wagner, dictating a cor-

respondence from both ends, and then accepting the letters so written as expressive of the signers' real feelings.] My shock and pain was now indescribable when I received your first letter to Bordeaux and was forced to gather therefrom that you still held *quite* the old ground—that the communications of that woman caused no lasting impression upon you, that you, though copying that reply, did not actually feel it, that you more than ever persisted in error with regard to me, my art and my aims. Then I lost courage to convert you. The next reply I wrote you in the first upheaval immediately after receipt of your letter. You may not find in it any decision, but the desperation expressed on your account. Read it again attentively and my mood must become clear to you.

From that day forward there came an end to my hardly regained good humour, and I was again troubled with nerves. People like the mother and the husband—who, as I soon realized, only quite superficially understood me—did not detect the awakening deep discords of my soul; such Philistines, seeing in us only the fantastic, half-demented, possibly only eccentric artist; however, my mood

did not escape my young friend, who understood me and herself comprehended that I *was unhappy*—as, verily, I was. No kind of explanations or agreements took place between us; she knew and learnt from me that I really loved you and that I was just as unhappy, therefore, that *we could not understand each other*. . . .

In Paris again. . . . I awaited daily a letter from you. . . . I hoped it was going to set me at rest as to your attitude after that letter from me! In vain, no letter arrived from you and there was nothing left for me but to imagine that you persisted defiantly in your views! Were I to return to Zurich I could but anticipate that we would soon have the most repugnant scenes. . . . Under these ideas . . . my decision then matured to write to you . . . and not to return to Zurich after all! . . . I read through your letters from Zurich once more and found among those few two in which you threatened me that you would leave me. . . . Verily, Minna, it was your fault that I began to grow accustomed to the thought of a separation!

Believe absolutely what I say here and you

will also understand that letter, so terrible to you, and you will not have to search for any other motives whatever for it. That which induced me to take this step concerned purely you and me and absolutely no third person—though, in accord with the truth, I do not wish to deny in the least that the acquaintance with that third person and the knowledge that I really could be understood without inspiring disgust—as with you—made me feel my unhappiness most deeply and bitterly. So far, dear wife, therefore, we alone have to deal with each other. . . .

The news of my step I communicated solely to the one being now actively interested in my destiny . . . that young woman in Bordeaux. I concealed from none the distress and the deep misery I felt, the bodily pain caused me by that step which I deemed necessary, the feeling of forlorn abandonment, and following the impression which this made on the latter it became evident that I had excited a strong inclination in the heart of the young woman. As a sixteen-year-old girl she was married to a very handsome young man with whom she fell in love, it becoming clear to her, however, after the

marriage, that neither of them had three thoughts in common, as she put it. Her mother, a pleasant woman, but without any depth and only worldly-wise, is very rich, as I recently learned, and helped her son-in-law out of impending bankruptcy with a not inconsiderable advance of capital. Husband and mother, in their own interest, consequently always held together, and the young woman, who felt more like a mortgage for the capital, yielded to her destiny to live with a man who was quite indifferent, leaving her entirely undisturbed in the pursuit of her artistic occupations and inclination. . . . I saw that this woman too was unhappy and conscious of her unhappiness. Her people had business and the administration of capital filling their minds, whereas she, on the other hand, thought of life itself. . . .

In the soul of this victim . . . the decision had matured that she would give vent to her feelings somehow. That communication of mine made a decided impression upon her, and suddenly *she wrote me that she had decided to leave her people and to come under my protection.* She informed me of this with such a glowing and desperate

passion that I was shocked and most deeply touched. I wrote her a letter fervent in its seriousness and described to her the utmost horror of my position and the immense daring and peril of her decision, and that she should commune with herself whether in cold blood she could decide to perish, as she would have to be prepared for that.

Continuing, Wagner tells his wife that he did not know it was she who had come to find him at Paris (a statement which we know to be untrue) and that he deeply regretted having missed her. Then he talks of Jessie disclosing her plans to her mother, of his trip to Bordeaux, and his ignoble ejection from the city by the police. He contrives to end his letter on a note that puts the obligation for future happy relations on Minna:

Thus this deplorable story ended—and I truly believe not to my shame. Suffice it to say that the solemn promise was taken from the young wife by all sorts of threats that she would not write me either directly or indirectly nor receive correspondence from me. [Even to his wife, Wagner will not admit that a woman would give him up except un-

der duress.] So they have also been after you to get hold of evidence against me? To me that is the vilest thing of all that they even tortured you, too, poorest one. They need not have required anything else and could have been quite at ease, because never —and this they knew—would I have divorced you, never would I have married someone else. Thus the affair came to an end by itself! However, I cannot be blamed if I deeply deplore the young wife mentioned here, just as I loathe her husband and her mother from the bottom of my heart.

This should be enough, dear Minna, to show clearly what my attitude was in this affair. If you do not believe me, if you do not believe me absolutely as I should be believed, you only make yourself very unhappy! I shall not dictate my conditions to you about my return [indeed!] because—as I have learned to know your condition—I have resolved to return to you definitely. You yourself, however, should commune with yourself after these intimations whether you can settle down completely where I am concerned! . . .

> Take as much pains as you possibly can to keep such unhappiness away from us both in future. It is in your power! Be unaffected with me and endeavour generally to enter somewhat more and in a more friendly manner into my whole spirit and ideas! I hope we shall still live together in great happiness to the end of our lives! . . .

Across the eight large pages filled in Wagner's cramped hand with the prolix, eloquent and insincere periods of this letter is a note in Minna's handwriting—a single sentence that says as much as Wagner was able to say in all that torrent of words: "Not to this letter, which contains many untruthful accusations and much of an insulting nature, but to my too great love, which lets me—forget?—forgive the past, do I owe this reunion!"

CHAPTER VII

THE LOST LETTER

FOLLOWING the Laussot affair in 1850, the Wagner household enjoyed a long spell of comparative tranquillity until 1858, when the Wesendonck affair came to a head. There may have been other philanderings on Wagner's part, but they led to no serious consequences. Of one of his reported loves, the singer Emilie Heim, who was supposed to have captured Wagner's affections just before Mathilde Wesendonck occupied them fully, Ashton Ellis tells us that Minna was supposed to have been very jealous. "The groundlessness of such jealousy is palpable," Ellis continues, "as Ignaz Heim (Emilie's husband) himself became Wagner's generous financier." This to another type of mind, might seem almost proof positive that Wagner and Emilie were on very friendly terms, for Wagner's surest method of financing himself was to make love to the wives of wealthy husbands.

This was what he did in the case of the Wesendoncks. He met them in 1852, not long

after the Laussot affair, and at first seems to have been attracted less by Mathilde's character than by Otto's cigars. Otto was a wealthy silk-merchant whose money had been made in New York. Mathilde, his wife, who was twenty-four when Wagner met her, at the age of thirty-nine (Mina being forty-three), appears to have been romantic, fond of poetry and art in the reverential manner peculiar to women who know nothing about either, and very self-conscious about it. She had a soft voice and was exceedingly good-looking. Wagner paid court to her and the financial results were very substantial.

If we were to believe the authorized accounts of this business, the Mathilde-Richard affair developed only in 1858; but by this time we should be wary enough to know that whatever the authorized account says is undoubtedly false. As a matter of fact, the affair began almost immediately. In June, 1853, Wagner had already composed a sonata for Mathilde. How serious he was at this time about her rather than about her husband's pocket-book is hard to say; Wagner himself would probably have been incapable of separating his motives. But being a consummate actor, he no doubt

threw himself boldly into his part, and proceeded to experience the emotions that he thought he ought to feel.

For six years Minna allowed this intimacy to go on without protest. Ellis's accusation of jealousy is evidently as baseless as most of his accusations against Minna. An example of his technique, typical in exaggerated form of the whole Bayreuth group, is his way of dwelling on the fact that Minna was ordered to take laudanum for her heart weakness. In one instance Ellis turns the word "laudanum" into "opium" and paints a picture of Minna as a drug addict; a little later, when Wagner's dog dies as the result of a street accident, Ellis surmises that Minna poisoned it with her laudanum. That so spiteful and petty a writer should have been selected by Wahnfried to translate the official biography of Wagner, as well as his letters, is a scathing commentary on the methods of that editorial group.

From Wagner's Autobiography we should never suspect that he had been wooing Mathilde beneath the nose of her husband, who was his benefactor, for six years. The story in the Autobiography, like every other story which Wagner tells us himself, is distorted out of all

semblance to the truth. But we will follow it through to the end before beginning the corrections.

In Wagner's account Mathilde gets no credit for bringing about her husband's most munificent gift to Wagner—a house next door to his own, which made it very convenient for the two lovers to see each other. Mathilde was responsible for that idea—we discover that from Wagner's letters. But here is what he tells us in his Autobiography: "One day my friends the Wesendoncks, who had returned from wintering in Paris, unfolded to me a most welcome prospect of the fulfilment of my ardent wishes in regard to my future place of abode. Wesendonck had already an idea of having a small house built for me on a site I was to select for myself. My own plans, elaborated with a deceptive skill, had already been submitted to an architect. But the acquisition of a suitable plot of land was and still remained a great difficulty." The land Wagner had hit upon was made up of pieces from a number of estates, all of which it would have been necessary to buy. Undaunted by this impediment to his plans, Wagner, who was always willing to spend other people's money, "put the difficulties

of my case before Wesendonck, and gradually created in him a desire to purchase this wide tract of land, and lay out a fine site containing a large villa for his own family. The idea was that I should also have a plot there. However, the demands made upon my friend in regard to the preliminaries and to the building of his house, which was to be on a scale both generous and dignified, were too many, and he also thought the enclosure of two families within the same confines might lead in time to inconveniences on both sides." In this he was entirely right, as time showed.

"There happened to be an unpretentious little country house with a garden which I had admired, and which was only separated from his estate by a narrow carriage drive; and this Wesendonck determined to buy for me. I rejoiced beyond measure when I heard of his intention." But in his rejoicing, Wagner did not forget to find fault with his benefactor's slowness; passages like the following make us wonder if the shrewder Cosima did not occasionally tone down the venomous nature of Wagner's unedited utterances, of which we have already had a sample in his letter to von Hornstein. "The shock experienced by the overcautious buyer

was consequently all the greater when he discovered that the present owner, with whom he had negotiated in too timid a fashion, had just sold his piece of land to someone else. Luckily it turned out that the buyer was a mental specialist, whose sole intention in making the purchase was to install himself with his lunatic asylum by the side of my friend." This discovery frightened Otto, rather shortsightedly, into buying the place for Wagner, who named it Asyl with great sense of fitness. Otto later had cause to regret that he had not preferred to have as neighbours a few harmless lunatics under the care of a keeper, rather than the unfettered Wagner, whose character would have provided a welcome field for study to a modern pathologist.

No sooner was Wagner in possession of his gift horse than he pried open its mouth and began investigating the condition of its teeth. "Our installation in this house . . . was not achieved without a disappointment. The cottage, which had only been designed for use in summer, had to be made habitable for the winter by putting in heating apparatus and various other necessities. It is true that most of the essentials in this respect were carried out by the

proprietor; but no end of difficulties remained to be solved.

"... The Wesendoncks moved into their villa, which had now been embellished by stucco workers and upholsterers from Paris. At this point a new phase began in my relations with this family, which was not really important, but nevertheless exercised considerable influence on the outward conduct of my life. We had become so intimate through being such near neighbours in a country place, that it was impossible to avoid a marked increase in our intimacy if only through meeting one another daily. I had often noticed that Wesendonck, in his straightforward open manner, had shown uneasiness at the way in which I made myself at home in his house. In many things, in the matter of heating and lighting the rooms, and also in the hours appointed for meals, consideration was shown me which seemed to encroach upon his rights as master of the house." But Wagner, in his magnanimous, big-hearted fashion, refused to take offence at Wesendonck's passive resistance to being shouldered out of his own house. "It needed a few confidential discussions on the subject to establish an agreement which was half implied and half expressed.

This understanding had a tendency, as time wore on, to assume a doubtful significance in the eyes of other people, and necessitated a certain measure of precaution in an intimacy which had now become exceedingly close." In other words, the whole village suspected that Mathilde and Richard were lovers—a very pleasant position for Minna. With that excess of innocence and ingenuousness which invariably gives him away, Wagner adds, "Curiously enough"—and those two words are just a little bit too much—"curiously enough, this closer association with my neighbour conicided with the time when I began to work out my libretto, *Tristan and Isolde*." It was a most appropriate moment for the opera in which good King Mark steps meekly into the background and allows Tristan to make away with his Isolde, to all the best music in the piece; Otto seems to have taken the hint admirably.

. . . On the third of April (1858) I sent the manuscript of the score of the first act of *Tristan und Isolde* to Leipzig to be engraved; I had already promised to give Frau Wesendonck the pencil sketch for the instrumentation of the prelude, and I sent this to

her accompanied by a note in which I explained to her seriously and calmly the feelings that animated me at the time. My wife had for some time been anxious as to her relations with our neighbour; she complained with increasing bitterness that she was not treated by her with the attention due to the wife of a man whom Frau Wesendonck was so pleased to welcome in her house, and that when we did meet, it was rather by reason of that lady's visits to me than to her. So far she had not really expressed any jealousy. As she happened to be in the garden that morning, she met the servant carrying the packet for Frau Wesendonck, took it from him and opened the letter. As she was quite incapable of understanding the state of mind I had described in the letter, she readily gave a vulgar interpretation to my words, and accordingly felt herself justified in bursting into my room and attacking me with the most extraordinary reproaches about the terrible discovery she had made. She afterwards admitted that nothing had vexed her so much as the extreme calmness and apparent indifference with which I treated her foolish conduct. As a matter of fact I never said a

word; I hardly moved, but simply allowed her to depart. I could not help realizing that this was henceforth to be the intolerable character of the conjugal relations I had resumed eight years before. I told her peremptorily to keep quiet and not be guilty of any blunder either in judgment or in act, and tried to make her realize to what a serious state of affairs this foolish occurrence had brought us. She really seemed to understand what I meant, and promised to keep quiet and not to give way to her absurd jealousy. Unfortunately, the poor creature was already suffering from a serious development of heart disease, which affected her temper; she could not throw off the peculiar depression and terrible restlessness which enlargement of the heart causes, and only a few days after she felt that she must relieve her feelings, and the only possible way in which she could think of doing so was by warning our neighbour, Frau Wesendonck, with an emphasis she thought was well meant, against the consequences of any imprudent intimacy with me.

As I was returning from a walk I met Herr Wesendonck and his wife in their car-

riage just starting for a drive. I noticed her troubled demeanour in contrast to the peculiarly smiling and contented expression of her husband. I realized the position clearly when I afterwards met my wife looking wonderfully cheerful. She held out her hand to me with great generosity, assuring me of her renewed affection. In answer to my question, whether she had by any chance broken her promise, she said confidently that like a wise woman she had been obliged to put things into proper order. I told her she would very probably experience some very unpleasant consequences through breaking her word. In the first place, I thought it essential she should take steps to improve her health as we had previously arranged, and told her she had better go as soon as possible to the health resort she had been recommended at Brestenberg. . . . When I left her at Brestenberg and took my leave she quite seemed to realize the painful seriousness of our position. I could say very little to comfort her, except that I would try, in the interests of our future life together, to mitigate the dreaded consequences of her having broken her word.

This sentence is typical. When Wagner is discovered philandering with Jessie Laussot, Eugène Laussot is blamed for compromising his wife's honour—by exposing Wagner's relations with her! Now Minna is overwhelmed under the awful sin of breaking her word—not to reveal her husband's relations with Mathilde! Wagner's code is evidently based on the principle that being found out is the only sin—and the person who brings his sins to light is the one he blames!

> On my return home I experienced the unpleasant effects of my wife's conduct towards our neighbour. In Minna's utter misconstruction of my purely friendly relations with the young wife, whose only interest in me consisted in her solicitude for my peace of mind and well-being, she had gone so far as to threaten to inform the lady's husband. Frau Wesendonck felt so deeply insulted at this, as she was perfectly unconscious of having done any wrong, that she was absolutely astounded at me, and said she could not conceive how I could have led my wife into such a misunderstanding. The outcome of this disturbance was that . . . I was absolved

from any responsibility for my wife's conduct; still, I was given to understand that henceforth it would be impossible for the injured lady to enter my house again, or indeed to continue to have any intercourse with my wife. They did not seem to realize, and would not admit, that this would entail the giving up of my home and my removal from Zurich. I hoped that although my relations with these good friends had been disturbed, they were not really destroyed, and that time would smooth things over. I felt that I must look forward to an improvement in my wife's health, when she would admit her folly, and thus be able to resume her intercourse with our neighbours in a reasonable manner. . . .

Minna returns from Brestenberg for a few days to look after the house.

I noticed by her manner that she no longer attached any importance to the recent domestic upheaval; the view she took of the matter was that there had been a little "love affair" which she had put straight. As she referred to this with a certain amount of unpleasant levity, I was obliged, though I would

willingly have spared her on account of her state of health, to explain clearly and firmly that in consequence of her disobedience and her foolish conduct towards our neighbour, the possibility of our remaining on the estate, where we had only just settled with so much difficulty, was a matter of the most serious doubt, and I felt bound to warn her that we must be prepared for the necessity of a separation, as I was fully determined that if this dreadful event took place, I would not agree to live under similar domestic conditions elsewhere. The earnestness with which I dwelt on the character of our past life together, on that occasion, so impressed and shocked her that, fully realizing it was through her fault that the home it had cost us so much pain to build up had been destroyed, she broke into a low wail of lamentation for the first time in our lives. This was the first and only occasion on which she gave me any token of loving humility, when late at night she kissed my hand as I withdrew. I was deeply touched at this, and the idea flashed across my mind that possibly a great and decided change might take place in the character of the poor woman, and this determined me to

renew my hope of the possibility of continuing the life we had resumed. . . .

Minna went back to Brestenberg, and when she returned again a petty incident, which seemed to show that Mathilde, not Minna, was the jealous one, provided the last straw. On July 15, Wagner brought Minna back from Brestenberg. "During my absence my servant . . . had thought fit to erect a kind of triumphal arch to celebrate the return of the mistress of the house." Mathilde took this as an affront and Wagner heard "much to my surprise, of the effect the triumphal arch had produced on our neighbour's young wife, who was still nursing her injured feelings. When I heard of her passionate protests, I realized to what a pass things had come, and immediately gave up all hope of putting a peaceful end to the discordant situation." Although he told Minna plainly "that from what I could see of the present position of affairs, our stay here was no longer possible. . . . This time, however, I had to admit that she was not altogether to blame."

After the obvious bias of the rest of his story, this admission from Wagner gives one to think

that Minna had probably suffered other indignities at the hands of the jealous Mathilde. The pair remained together at Asyl another month, then Wagner took his customary refuge in flight, a remedy which he had found sovereign for untangling the knotty situation after the Laussot fiasco. From Venice he wrote passionate letters to Mathilde and Minna indiscriminately. Finally he returned at the end of 1859, and again took up residence with Minna, remaining with her until Cosima von Bülow appeared on the scene.

If we disentangle Wagner's account of the Wesendonck affair from the maze of words in which he has hidden it, it hardly assumes great importance. His story, summarized, is this: Otto presented him with a home next to his own. Propinquity caused Wagner and Mathilde to see a great deal of each other, but their relations were merely friendly. Minna, jealous and misunderstanding, caused a scene, as a result of which Wagner gently but firmly shipped her off for a time for the good of her health. On her return Mathilde's jealousy precipitated the parting.

In all this there hardly seems reason for a separation. The whole affair appears rather in-

significant. Much more exciting is Wagner's own account of the Laussot affair, with the threat of shooting by an irate husband and a frantic journey on Wagner's part in search of his lover. The plan of elopement with Jessie is plainly recounted in "Mein Leben," but we hear no indication of any intention of eloping with Mathilde.

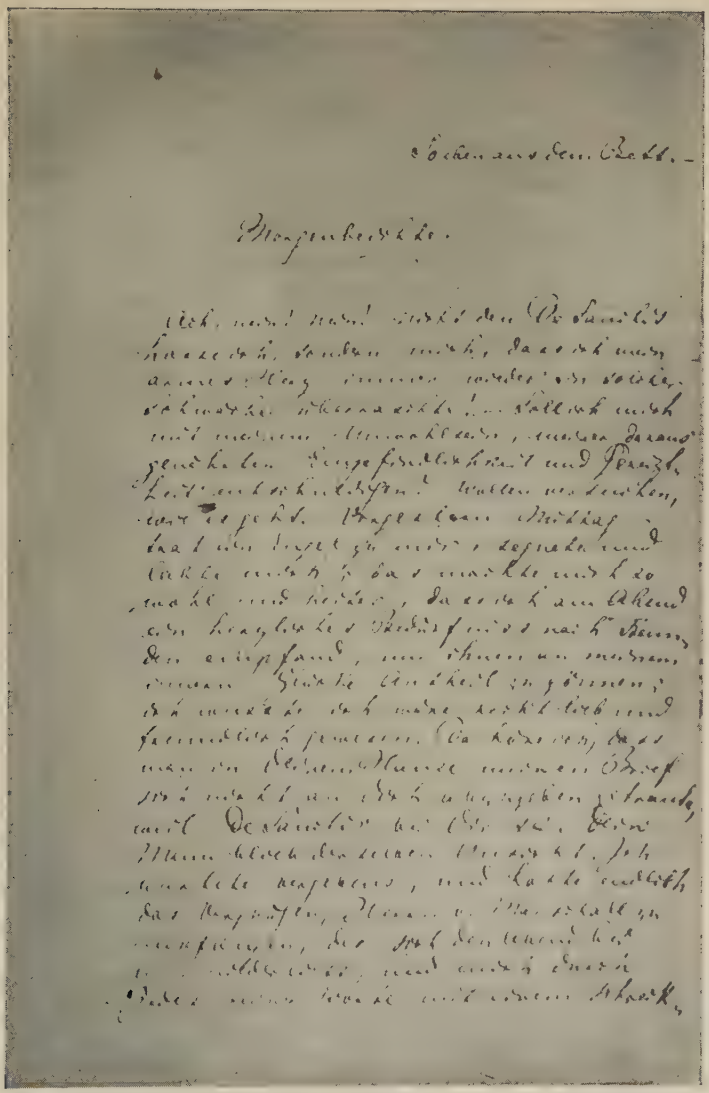
Why, then, has not the same attention been given to suppressing the Wesendonck affair as was devoted to the more difficult Laussot episode? The answer is obvious when once we think of it. It was Cosima to whom the Autobiography was dictated and Cosima who was at the head of Wahnfried's editing board after Wagner's death. It was she who took Wagner away from his wife. She lived with him before Minna's death and before her own divorce, had illegitimate children by him, and generally was placed in a very shady position. It was to her interest to make it appear that the Wesendonck affair had broken up Wagner's home, and that only after the damage was done did she appear on the scene, as a sort of comforter to the afflicted.

It cannot be denied that the Wesendonck affair had an important bearing on the final sepa-

ration. Minna herself speaks of it in a letter as the beginning of the end. Perhaps the affair with Cosima would have been less fatal if it had developed later, after the sore of the Wesendonck episode had been more completely healed. Wagner's attitude after the loss of Mathilde was somewhat different from that which followed the earlier affair; he ran about with a number of women and never completely settled down until his alliance to Cosima. But he lived with Minna again after the Wesendonck separation, and it was Cosima who parted them finally.

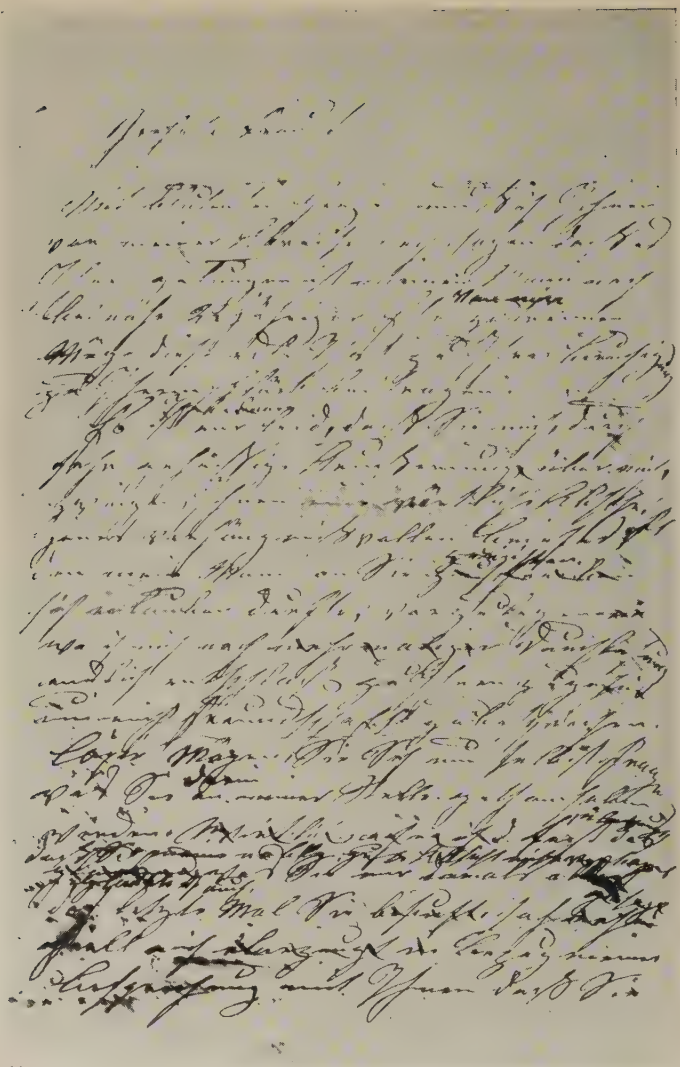
It was to Cosima's interest, then, to make it appear, as she did, that the Wesendonck affair was the end of Wagner's interest in Minna. Reading the official publications, one would consider the time the two spent together after that as more or less accidental. The impression given is that Wagner never intended to resume regular domestic relations with Minna again. This, however, is not true. Wagner continued to write to Minna from Venice, saying that he intended to return and live with her. He would probably have finished his days with her if Cosima (or some other young woman) had not come along.

It is for this reason that the Wesendonck af-



Charles Lavell Photo

THE BEGINNING OF THE FAMOUS "LOST" LETTER WHICH RICHARD WAGNER WROTE TO MATHILDE WESENDONCK, INTERCEPTED BY MINNA



Charles Lavell Photo

DRAFT OF LETTER WRITTEN BY MINNA TO MATHILDE WESENDONCK

fair is given so much more prominence by the official biographers than was accorded to any of the others; but they did their best for Wagner by insisting that his love for Mathilde was spiritual. No gross physical passion was to be permitted to appear in the same frame with the prophylactic portrait of their ethereal hero. Another reason for choosing to make the Wesendonck affair the point of severance is the greater ease with which its purity can be maintained; otherwise his affair with Frederike Meyer, or with the little servant girl he employed in a double capacity, might have been used. But these affairs had also the objection that they could hardly be made to appear in any but a gross aspect unfitting to the master's shiny new reputation; besides, they came into Cosima's period, and it was certainly not the intention of Wahnfried to suggest that the man who loved Cosima could simultaneously have manifested equal ardour towards his maidservant.

There was one other cogent reason for not attempting to suppress the Wesendonck affair. Frau Wesendonck would not hear of it. To the end of her life she never ceased to titillate at the lot that had been hers when she touched the fringe of greatness. She was proud of her affair

with Wagner, and insisted on publishing his letters to her. Wahnfried was forced to acquiesce, but saw to it that the letters were not issued in any indiscreet fashion. Wagner had ordered that the Wesendonck letters should be destroyed; but though Wahnfried seems to have made rather a specialty of destroying inconvenient evidence, in this case they were interested in publishing as many of the actual facts as could be discreetly given out. Wagner, apparently, had destroyed most of the letters himself. Mr. Ellis says the reason so many of them are missing must be that Minna destroyed them; but this is as ridiculous as most of his assumptions. We know by a letter of Wagner's that he carried Mathilde's letters away with him when he went to Venice and had a special box made to keep them in; we know also that he wished them to be destroyed. So it is entirely unnecessary to imagine that Minna, who kept scrupulously all the letters that came into her hands, destroyed precisely those which would have put her case in the most favourable light. The fourteen letters from Mathilde that Wagner missed were published against his expressed wishes, and then destroyed, an action which Mr. Ellis described as carrying out both

Wagner's and Frau Wesendonck's wishes. Mr. Ellis's mind moved in a mysterious way his blunders to perform.

That suggestion is not Mr. Ellis's only indiscretion on the subject of the Wesendonck letters. Wahnfried usually kept very quiet about the fate of the originals from which his editions of Wagner's various letters were drawn. Mr. Ellis, with marvellous unintelligence, lets the cat out of the bag. After insisting that the Wesendonck letters—which finally came out *after* Frau Wesendonck's death, and hence were subject to the same editing as the rest of Wagner's correspondence—were printed with only trifling changes and omissions, he remarks that after being printed they were destroyed. There could have been no possible reason whatsoever for destroying these manuscript letters, sentimentally and financially of the greatest value, unless they varied from the printed letters and Wahnfried wished to hide the falsity of the authorized version. Every scrap of musical manuscript and of Wagner's writings, other than his letters, has been carefully preserved and handsomely bound by his worshippers. Wagner relics are looked upon at Bayreuth with the same reverence as the bones of saints. Yet

it was this same company of adorers that destroyed the Wesendonck letters. There was obviously a reason.

So the Wesendonck affair came out. We have had Wagner's account, and biographers were able to piece out from the letters a slightly different version. Julius Kapp, a thorn in the flesh of Wahnfried, had more disclosures to make in "Richard Wagner and Women," which is so important a book on Wagner that only the enmity of Wahnfried can explain its never having been translated; but Ernest Newman has made part of Kapp's work accessible to the English public, translating, in particular, some extremely interesting letters from Minna. Kapp got hold of Minna's letters easily enough; if Wahnfried's had been a conscientious editorial board it could have done the same; on the contrary it never printed a single line of Minna's, probably destroyed many of her letters to Wagner, and in general sought to give the impression that Minna was so nearly illiterate that any letter of hers would be utterly devoid of interest. Ellis gives one letter, which he translates as badly and with as much prejudice as he translated Wagner's, but with the emphasis reversed. In Wagner's letters he leaves out or

changes anything he thinks should be put more delicately; for Minna he produces a very inferior type of letter. Remarking on its "commonness," he goes on to say that all of Minna's letters give the impression of vulgarity and inability to comprehend her great husband. As a matter of fact, Minna's letters generally give a glimpse of a woman of fine character. We shall see some of them in a moment.

Wagner begins the Wesendonck affair after the purchase of Asyl; that that was a deliberate misdating on his part is demonstrated easily enough. We have already pointed out that as early as 1853 (five years before the break) he had composed a sonata for Mathilde. The year previous to that (just after their first meeting) he was taking the trouble of giving her lessons in composition. That does not sound like Wagner—unless he had a particular reason for being so amiable.

As usual, his letters give the lie to the Autobiography. The fact that his affair with Mathilde had lasted six years is evidenced, for instance, in a letter to his sister Clara, dated August 20, 1858. He writes: "What has supported, comforted and above all strengthened me *these six years past* to remain by Minna's

side despite the enormous differences in our characters and dispositions, is the affection of that young gentlewoman." Praeger remarks that he observed Minna to be jealous of another when he visited the Wagners in 1856, and Ellis comments on this statement that it is on a par with Praeger's usual unreliability—although Ellis takes the prize for that failing himself, when he remarks, for instance, in an attempt to gloss over Minna's having to perform in Riga to help pay the expenses of the Wagner ménage, that it must have happened before her marriage, though he gives the date as 1839, knowing that Minna and Wagner were married in 1836! Praeger's evidence that what was going on was long obvious to everyone is supported, moreover, by von Hornstein, who remarked it in 1856.

Indeed, one of Wagner's own letters establishes the fact that Otto knew about Wagner's too great friendship for his wife and was jealous from the early days of their acquaintance. This passage occurs in the same letter to Wagner's sister as that quoted above. It is suppressed in the authorized edition of the family letters, and Ellis, humbly following Wahnfried's lead, suppressed it in his translation, be-

cause, he said, he decided that was Wahnfried's wish—and to Mr. Ellis Wahnfried's wish was law. However, he committed another error when he published his translation of the Wesendonck letters, and printed the passage, remarking that he saw no harm in it. He failed to realize the importance, from Cosima's point of view, of dating the Wesendonck affair forward to 1858. Instead of Mr. Ellis's translation we quote Mr. Newman's, which is free from the former's eccentricities; it is to be regretted that Mr. Newman has never translated the Wagner letters in their entirety.

> From the very beginning of our acquaintance (Wagner explains) she (Mathilde) has felt the most unflagging and refined solicitude for me, and *obtained from her husband* in the most courageous fashion *everything that might lighten my life.* His wife's frankness could have no other effect than soon plunging Wesendonck in increasing jealousy. Her greatness consisted in this, that she constantly kept her husband informed of what was going on in her heart, and gradually brought him to the fullest resignation as regards herself. It can be

imagined what sacrifices and combats it took to bring this about; her success was only rendered possible by the depth and grandeur of her attachment, in which there was no trace of self-seeking, which gave her the power to exhibit herself in such strength to her husband that the latter must stand aside from her even if she should threaten her own death, and prove his unshakable love for her by upholding her in her care for me. It became a matter of preserving the mother of his children, and for their sakes—who, indeed, formed an insuperable barrier between us twain—he resigned himself to his rôle of renunciation. Thus, while he was consumed with jealousy, she succeeded in again interesting him in me to such an extent that he often came to my support; and when at length it became a question of providing me with the little house and garden I desired, it was she who, by dint of the most unheard-of struggles, persuaded him to buy for me the lovely piece of land adjoining his own estate. The most wonderful thing, however, is that I actually never had a notion of these combats that she endured for me; for her sake her husband had always to appear

friendly and easy towards me; not a frown was to enlighten me, not a hair of my head was to be touched; serene and cloudless were the heavens to be above me; smooth and soft was my path to be. So unheard-of a success had this glorious love of the pure and noble wife.

The use of the word wife here was extremely tactless; Ellis altered it to woman.

From this passage, which Ellis thought harmless to Wahnfried's carefully built-up story, we find out two things. First, that the affair actually began much earlier than Wagner admits, secondly, that Otto's gifts to Wagner were obtained through Mathilde, and particularly that the cottage came through her. Wagner himself gave her the hint for that. On August 11, 1856, he wrote to Mathilde, asking her to use her good offices to persuade someone else to give him an estate. At every possible opportunity he explains that this is Minna's idea; he says it so often that we can be sure it was not. Mathilde was unable to get other persons to contribute to Wagner's comfort, but she did succeed in getting her husband to provide Asyl for him.

Asyl was most convenient for the prosecution of the love affair, as Wesendonck had evidently feared, judging from his remark, quoted above in Wagner's account of the affair, that he foresaw inconveniences if both families lived so close together. Wagner discovered them. Practically living in Otto's house, having meals served at the hours when he wanted them, he still found the nominal master's presence an annoyance. "It became really intolerable to me," he says in "Mein Leben," "to give up whole evenings to conversations and entertainments in which my good friend Otto Wesendonck thought himself bound to take part at least as much as myself and others. His anxiety lest, as he imagined, everything in his house would soon go my way rather than his, gave him, moreover, that peculiar burdensomeness with which a man who thinks himself slighted throws himself into every conversation in his presence, something like an extinguisher on a candle."

In Wagner's view Otto should have practised a little more thoroughly that noble virtue of renunciation about which he was always talking. "Wagner and Mathilde may talk as they like about their 'renunciation,' " says Newman, who

has some scathing comments to make on Wagner's attitudinizing. "These words are only literary symbols with them, subtle self-flattery, an extra and rather delicious flavouring in their cup. But the cup itself was a sweet one. Poor Otto had *his* part thrust upon him willy-nilly; he was dragged on the scene, against his will, to act in a play for which he had no fancy, dressed up as Third Renunciator and primed to speak the lines the author of the piece put in his mouth."

So we come to the episode of the fatal letter —the letter which Minna took from the servant. In two of her letters, which we owe to Kapp, she gives her own account of the affair. The translation is Newman's: "Madame Wesendonck visited my husband secretly, as he did her, and forbade my servant, when he opened the door for her, to tell me that she was above." (Minna and Wagner occupied different floors of the house.) "I let it all go on calmly. Men often have an affair; why should I not tolerate it in the case of my husband? I did not know jealousy. Only these meannesses, these humiliations, might have been spared me, and my ludicrously vain husband must conceal it from me."

Wagner also, she thinks, visits Mathilde too often when Otto is not at home. "On the 6th (of April, 1858) they were both with us. On the 7th I noticed that Richard was strangely restless; at every ring he came out; he had a big roll of papers in his hand, which he wanted to send to Frau Wesendonck; but he would not part with it when I wanted to look after it for him, and he hid it awkwardly. All this astonished me a little. When he could wait no longer, he called our servant. I was there by chance when the latter passed, and I asked him for the roll of music. I undid it, and took out the thick letter that was enclosed in it, opened it, and read the most jealous love-letter. . . . After a wild night of love that he had had, he writes to her: 'Thus it went on the whole night through. In the morning I was rational again' . . ." and so forth. Minna quotes other passages, but there is no point in repeating them, as the letter will be quoted directly in a moment.

"What do you say to that?" she continues. "At midday I told my husband that I had opened and read his fine letter; he was rather alarmed, but I said I would not suffer this deception towards the poor man; I would go

away, but he must call this woman his own for ever. Richard wanted to justify himself with his wonderful gift of the gab, but I would not have it. . . . Richard tried to force me to be silent, and to persuade me of the purity of his relations. How ridiculous! I abide by my conviction."

There is considerable difference between Minna's and Richard's account of this affair. It appears that, in place of keeping silence, he tried to exercise his wonderful "gift of the gab" (as Newman translates *vortrefflichen Suade*); that it was Minna's idea rather than Richard's that she should go away, and finally that she made no promise to be silent. On the other hand, as we shall see in a moment, Minna's premise of "a wild night of love" is unjustified by the contents of the letter, unless she meant thoughts of love or had other information about her husband's activities of the previous evening. At any rate, she believed, as any European woman would have believed, that her husband was making love to Mathilde.

This letter has long been a *desideratum* among biographers of Wagner. Evidently it convinced Minna of the seriousness of the affair. Hence commentators have itched to see

for themselves the words that so moved Minna. This "lost letter" is now found. Minna saved it, and Natalie kept it after her. It is in the Burrell Collection, and its close correspondence to the rather long extract which Minna quotes from it, of which only the beginning was given above, stamps it absolutely as the sought letter, even if the date, April, 1858, had not been added in Minna's handwriting to identify it.

The letter is marked "Just out of bed," and is headed, "Morning Confession."

> Oh, no! no! (Wagner starts pyrotechnically). It is not De Sanctis whom I hate, but *myself*, by catching out my poor heart again and again in such weakness! (De Sanctis was a professor who had incurred the danger of Wagner's hate by calling on Mathilde, as we shall see below.)
>
> Shall I offer as excuse my indisposition, my sensitiveness and irritation resulting therefrom? Let's try and see how it will go. The day before yesterday at noon an angel came up to me who blessed and nurtured me; this made me feel so well and cheerful that at eventide I felt a hearty desire for friends in order to let them partake

of my inward happiness; I knew I would have been very pleasant and friendly. Then I hear that one dared not deliver my letter to you in your house, because De Sanctis was with you. Your husband remained of the same opinion. I waited in vain, and in the end had the pleasure of receiving Herr v. Marschall, who stayed for the evening with us, and whose every word filled me with terrible hatred against all De Sanctis's in the world. The fortunate one—he has now kept her away from me! And by virtue of what gift? Only by her patience. I could not blame him for taking it so seriously with you; everybody takes it so very seriously when dealing with you! See how seriously I am taking it! To the extent of torture for you! But why does she cultivate these pedantic fetters? Well, this I could soon answer. But the more I was able to, the more I annoyed the bore; he became blurred with Marschall in my dream and out of this a vision appeared to me in which I recognized all the misery in the world for myself.

Thus it went on the whole night through. In the morning I was rational again, and from the depth of my heart could pray to

my angel; and this prayer is Love. Love! Deepest soul's joy in this love, the source of my redemption! Then came the day with its evil weather; the joy of being in your garden was denied me; my work would not go at all. Thus my whole day was a struggle between melancholy and longing for you, and every time I felt a real longing for you, our tedious pedant kept on coming in between, he who had stolen you from me, and I couldn't help admitting to myself that I hated him. Ah me! I had to tell you! I simply couldn't help it. But it really was paltry of me and I deserved a fitting punishment for it. What shall it be?—Next Monday I shall come to tea after the lesson and shall be really pleasant to De Sanctis for the rest of the evening, and talk French to the joy of everybody. . . .

Then comes a section, half of this eight-page letter, devoted to a dispute they had had about Goethe's *Faust*, in which Wagner has much to say about Marguerite's love; then:

What nonsense I am drivelling! Is it the pleasure of speaking alone, or the joy of talking to you?—Yes, to you! But when I see

your eye, then I simply cannot speak any more; then everything I might have to say simply becomes void! Look, then everything becomes so indisputably true to me, then I am so sure of myself, when this wonderful, holy eye rests upon me, and I submerge myself within it! then there is no longer any object or any subject; then everything is one united, deep infinite harmony! Lo, that is peace and in that peace, highest, ideal life! Oh fool, who would seek to win peace and the world from without! The blind one, so he did not recognize your eye and did not find his soul within it! Only inside, within, only in depths does salvation dwell!—Even to you, I can only speak and explain myself, when I don't see you—or may not see you.

Don't be angry with me, and forgive my childishness of yesterday; you were quite right in calling it that!

The weather appears to be mild. To-day I shall come to the garden; as soon as I see you—I hope I shall find you undisturbed for a moment.

Take my whole soul as a morning greeting!

"This letter, if she had been able to understand it at all," Wagner wrote to his sister Clara, "would really have been able to give her all the pacification she could have desired, for the theme of it, too, was our resignation." The reader is invited to hunt for himself for any suggestion of resignation in this letter. He will probably find that, like Minna, he is unable to understand it in the sense in which Wagner wants us to think it can be understood. Mathilde would probably have had the same difficulty.

Minna went to see Frau Wesendonck. This is her account of the episode: "Frau Wesendonck was very grateful and friendly to me, accompanied me hand in hand to the steps and everything was settled in a friendly way. Afterwards, however, she thought differently of it: she told her husband that I had insulted her frightfully, but without telling him the real truth as to the relations. She cried out to Richard how deeply and horribly I had offended her—in spite of the fact that I had been delicate enough not to show her the fatal letter, which I had in my pocket. But that is the way with common little natures. They can do nothing but tittle-tattle and stir up mischief."

Wagner's account of Minna's visit to Mathilde reads rather differently. It is again to his sister Clara:

> She went over (to Mathilde) behind my back and—no doubt without realizing it herself—wounded the gentle lady grossly. After she had told her: "If I were an ordinary woman I should go to your husband with this letter," there was nothing for Frau Wesendonck—who was conscious of never having had a secret from her husband (which a woman like Minna cannot understand!)—but to inform him at once of the scene and its cause.—Herewith, then, had the delicacy and purity of our relations been broken in upon in a coarse and vulgar way, and many things must now alter. Not till some time after did I make it clear to my friend that it would never be possible to make a nature like my wife's comprehend relations so lofty and unselfish as ours; for I had to endure her grave and deep reproach that I had omitted this, whereas her husband had always been her confidant.

This affair did not, of course, cause Minna's heart disease, but it did it no good; and Wag-

ner, though he is constantly talking about his worry for Minna's health, seems to have been able to put it aside when he desired to vent his wrath on her. She writes to Frau Herwegh (whose opinion of Wagner is expressed in her characterization of him as "this pocket edition of a man, this folio of vanity, heartlessness, and egoism") after her return from Brestenberg to see that her husband's home was being well kept.

> My good husband could be good and assuage my pains if he would not let himself be dragged about by certain people: his heart is good but very weak! So it comes about that he often writes me really good, dear, comforting letters, but still more often throws the wickedest and vulgarest things at me in them, cracks other people up to the skies, and levels me to the earth. This, my dear Emma, eats away my heart. I can seldom weep over these vulgarities, and that is very bad for me: but the heart in my body chokes as if it were being twisted about. On Sunday, a week ago, I was at home, but only for twenty-three hours, so that I had no time to visit you. I wish I had not gone: the dear

Richard vented his spleen on me till two in the morning.

Finally, on the 2nd of August, we have Minna deciding to separate from Wagner. The opening of her letter makes it evident that her correspondent knew that it was Minna, not Richard, who decided to leave the other. It was not until after Minna expressed this determination, on the 17th of August, to be exact, that Wagner left for Venice. Thus the last detail of his account proves as false as all the rest.

Why did he leave, when he might have been free to remain with Mathilde? Perhaps the episode of her jealousy over the triumphal arch caused a temporary estrangement there; for it was probably Wagner himself, not his servant, who erected that symbol of welcome for Minna's return.

It grieves me (Minna wrote, when she had decided upon separation) to hear you talk as if I alone were the cause of my separation from my husband. You know only too well, if you question yourself closely, how hard for me even a short separation has always been, especially now, when it is uncertain whether

and when I shall see him again. It is no small thing when a separation faces one after twenty-two years of marriage. I, at any rate, cannot take it lightly. If it rested with me, I assure you it would certainly not happen. As regards forbearance with men, I am likewise enlightened and have already overlooked a good many things, like other women. *I have besides gone on being blind a good six years.* It is simply impossible, for the sake of Richard's honour, to remain here since her husband—*I don't know how*—has also learned of the relation. When I returned I was violently threatened and assailed by my husband, with the object of getting me to associate again with that woman. I yielded, was willing to go this great length: that is really all that it is possible for a wife in my position to do: but the husband and in the end this woman herself will not: she is—so my husband shouted at me—raging, beside herself, at my being there, and out of jealousy will not suffer me to remain: only Richard shall live here, which, however, he cannot do. Richard has two natures; he is ensnared on the other side, and clings to me from habit, that is all. My resolve now is, since this

woman will not endure my living with my husband, and he is weak enough to give way to her, that I will live by turns in Dresden, Berlin and Weimar, until either Richard or God calls me away. My health does not improve under these circumstances; all the waters in the world are no use when the mind is assailed by upsets of this kind.

Richard preached renunciation, Minna practised it.

One point that still remains not completely solved has puzzled many biographers: was there actual physical love between the two? It seems impossible that there should not have been; yet the lost letter actually proves nothing more dangerous than that they had been reading Goethe together. But Wagner, of course, was a miracle of indirectness in his speech. In "Mein Leben" he reproves some friends for telling *risqué* stories, which he burdens with the heavy word "obscenities"; it is a regularly remarked phenomenon that the persons most touchy about all appearance of the *risqué* are those whose actions give them most right to be uncomfortable in the presence of banter on scabrous subjects. Minna probably knew Wag-

ner better than any other living person, and she was therefore best equipped to pierce through his verbiage and discover what it meant. It is even possible that he was accustomed to use mutually understood symbols, and that Minna knew what they meant, from having herself received scores of love-letters from him—love-letters hardly differing in tone from this one. A portion of his letter can be read with damning and irrefutable meaning, if this be assumed. Certainly, Minna's action was evidence of what she thought; but we cannot know whether her indignation was against a physical affair (she had tolerated those before) or because she saw that her husband was really serious about this woman—saw that Mathilde was taking a place in his life that no woman could share with another. The Wahnfried insistence that this affair was purely a spiritual one surely fails to hurt Minna's case; rather. it puts her on a higher level than ever.

On the other hand, was it possible that the two were not lovers in the full sense of the word? Otto and Mathilde seem to have acquired to some extent the domestic attitude that in Europe is looked upon with amusement as typically American. A spoiled wife was per-

mitted by her husband to involve herself in any entanglement she wished, without his interference. A concomitant of the American phenomenon of the flirtatious wife and the complaisant husband is the extreme innocence of the wife's relations with the gentleman she amuses herself with. This attitude has always frankly amazed Europeans, who expect to find fire where there is smoke. It is not inherently unlikely that Mathilde was a woman of this sort. Left alone all day, by her husband's preoccupation with business, she flirted with Wagner. Natalie, who referred to her as the "super-devilish Mathilde," saw her as a coquette who ensnared Wagner and led him on without ever returning his love, but Natalie, of course, is a prejudiced witness. Minna calls Mathilde "that cold woman spoilt by happiness," which also fits in well enough with the picture of her as the siren offering nothing but destruction.

Again, Otto was better endowed physically than Wagner. He was handsome, masculine and strong. Wagner was a little man who looked like one of his own gnomes. But to counteract that, he was an artist and he told everyone at every opportunity what a great

artist he was. Mathilde enjoyed no particular comprehension of his music, but she knew that music was something to be revered, and so she proceeded to accord to it reverence of a sort which it would never have received from anyone more apprehendingly acquainted with its real nature. Or, to be more exact, not being able to revere anything as abstract as music, she converted her admiration into feeling for the musician. Wagner seemed to possess the gift, common to men who are successful in deriving aid from women, of combining the power of making women believe in the importance of his artistic mission, with that of impressing his practical helplessness upon them. The latter fact appealed to their maternal, the former to their romantic instinct. When a man attacks simultaneously on those two fronts, a woman is as good as lost. Wagner, by his constant dependence on Mathilde, by his constant harping on his own poverty and consequent impotence, made her mother him at the same time that his glamour as an artist aroused the other side of her womanly nature.

We must conclude, I think, that the relations between Mathilde and Richard were more than friendly. Wagner speaks much more ex-

plicitly than was ordinarily his custom when he writes that, in September, 1857, she "dedicated herself to death that she might give him life," and again when, writing to Mathilde from Venice one year later, he reminds her of the day he brought to her the poem of *Tristan* and she confessed her love. His letters from Venice—where he also wrote a diary for her covering a span of eighteen months—are certainly those of a lover. He was also writing and telegraphing to Minna, once sending her as a souvenir a miniature gondola, the receipt of which must have made her laugh or cry. He wrote to Minna to keep up her courage, "so that we may enjoy the evening of our days together as cheerfully and unclouded as is possible"—with a break, presumably, Newman comments dryly, to permit him to die in Mathilde's arms, for at the same time he was writing her: "Now I know that it is still granted to me to die in your arms."

Minna must have been right. It is inconceivable that Wagner, being the man we know him to have been, continued so long to court Mathilde unless he were successful. Even Otto's cigars and money would not have explained it, for Wagner was quite as ready to

toss aside wealthy patrons recklessly as he was alert to gain them.

From Venice he continued to address volumes of letters to Mathilde, and to bombard Minna with telegrams—such as "Quiet! Quiet! Patience and good spirits!" Finally, towards the end of 1859, the domestic ménage was again established in Paris; but the correspondence with Mathilde continued for the rest of his life.

There was a note of humour when, in 1863, Cosima, then still Cosima von Bülow, wrote for some of Wagner's manuscripts that were in Mathilde's possession, and the latter wrote to Wagner gently but firmly: "Of course, I cannot think of sending anything away, unless at your personal wish." She refused to be put off by Wagner's amanuensis, though that amanuensis was also his *alter ego*.

Even after his death, Mathilde refused to be ejected from her place by Wagner's side. She wrote to Ashton Ellis after Praeger's book—which certainly was not unfair to Wagner, but which failed to eulogize him as others did. Ellis was so delighted at actually being admitted to Frau Wesendonck's circle of correspondents that instead of simply printing the

letter in the ordinary fashion he had a facsimile of it made on four pages of special paper and inserted in the front of his book. I give it in Mathilde's own quaint English.

You will believe me that the contents of your writing, deeply afflicts me. It is a base and hateful beginning, that of Mr. Ferdinand Praeger's in writing and publishing a book, merely to darken the Meister's Memory to Mankind, by making "Gossip" on the Intimacy of his private Life, a Life full of Conflikt, Affliction and Suffering!

What hath the Publik to do with it? Deed he not bequeath to him, his unequaled, unrivaled everlasting Work's? And is this holy Testament not above all Doubt and Calumny? Is it not sufficient to secure him vor ever, the grateful and tender Respect, the awe and the Consideration, due to his Greatness and his Genius? . . .

The "Episode" of Bordeaux has been related by the "Meister" himself, and is to be found in the Edition of: "Hinterlassene Schriften." Need we know more? . . .

The truth is: that R. Wagner's affection and gratefulness to the "Wesendonck's" re-

mained the same throughout his life, and that the "Wesendonck's" on their side, never ceased to belong to his most true and sincerest friend's until to Death! . . .

What shall I say More! Is it worth while, to speak in so serious a matter, from my owne personal Self? . . .

The tie that bound him to Mathilde Wesendonck, whome he than called his "Muse," was of so high, pure, nobel and ideal Nature that, alas, it will only be valued of those, that in their own Nobel chest find the same elevation and selfishlessness of mind! . . .

Mathilde also possessed the gift of the gab.

CHAPTER VIII

WAGNER AND WOMEN

ON November 17, 1859, Minna came to Paris and rejoined Wagner. But it would be inaccurate to say that the two settled down again, as they had done twice before. Wagner entered upon a period of restlessness. If he had been eighteen or twenty, his conduct would have been described as sowing his wild oats. He was, however, at the other crucial moment in a man's life. He was forty-six. It is a bad age for a married man whose marriage is not impregnable from attack from without, but it is a worse age for his wife. It is particularly bad if that wife happens to be fifty and the man's taste is for girls of twenty or thereabouts.

Wagner's restlessness was manifested in two forms, constant moving from place to place and numerous minor affairs. Of the latter we should know nothing if it were not for the diligence of Julius Kapp who, in "Richard Wagner and Women" threw considerable il-

lumination on apparently quite innocent references in "Mein Leben."

Our difficulties with "Mein Leben" increase at this point. Up to the year 1861, we have had to deal with the first three parts of the Autobiography, which had previously been printed, which had been seen by several persons, and of which Mrs. Burrell's copy provided a check to the possible changes that Wahnfried would have liked to make. But with the year 1861 we enter upon the apocryphal three years. Now we hardly know whether the Autobiography can be accepted, even as an untruthful indication of what was going on. Our experience with those portions which we *have* been able to check has so thoroughly proved the duplicity of Wahnfried that we fear to accept even the most innocent statement on the authority of this mysterious fourth section which, so far as we know, is not even from Wagner's pen.

Conscientious, truthful biographers, presenting the self-works of their subjects, are always careful to give us full annotations whenever there has been a digression from the ordinary course of events. Wahnfried, on the contrary, has been careful never to give any indication of

the many contradictions between the Autobiography and the letters, many as there are in spite of the careful editing. Pains have been taken not to offer any information, that could be suppressed, on the authenticity of the material it offered. A truthful and meticulous custodian of a great man's history would have noted, before the beginning of the Fourth Part, that it did not appear in the original "Mein Leben," and would have explained that Wagner either added it later, or that someone else did.

It would have been an easy task for Cosima to have added those three years to Wagner's account of his life. To begin with, she was practically the author of the Autobiography. When we are told that Wagner "dictated" his autobiography to Cosima, we must not jump to the conclusion that he supplied the words which she simply took down. Cosima actually supplied the words. Wagner's writings and letters are in the most idiomatic German, and couched, too, in a strong, fiery direct style that is lacking in the rather whining tone of the Autobiography. "Mein Leben," as Mrs. Burrell pointed out, is written in a language which "is not the German of a German." George

Ainslie Hight, a biographer of Wagner, looked upon this accusation with such suspicion as to investigate it. "I have submitted this remark to the judgment of my friend, Professor Fiedler of Oxford," he reported. "He confirms it generally, and has pointed out several slight solecisms which, though trifling enough in themselves, are not such as a German would have written. Madame Cosima, be it remembered, was not a German; she was brought up in Paris, and, though she spoke it perfectly, German was not her native language."

Cosima probably wrote after conversations with Wagner, and with the aid of the notebooks in which he had always kept a detailed account of everyday doings. Mrs. Burrell is very severe about the result of this process. "I maintain that Wagner consented under pressure to the book being put together, that he yielded to the temptation of allowing everyone else's character to be blackened in order to make his own great fault (his desertion of Minna for Cosima) pale before the iniquities, real or invented, of others. . . . Richard Wagner is not responsible for this book."

I am afraid we cannot be as charitable as Mrs. Burrell. No doubt Richard was greatly

influenced by Cosima, no doubt she had a considerable hand in the making of this book, but Wagner passed it for the printer, and we have seen that Wagner was entirely capable of the meanness and pettiness which we find in the Autobiography. Some of the slanders are obviously his own, for they are directed against persons to whom he bore ill will, but whom Cosima had no reason for disliking; in others the venom appears to have been more probably suggested by Cosima.

Wagner must accept responsibility for the first three parts of "Mein Leben," but so far as the last part is concerned he may, perhaps, be acquitted.

Those first three sections, that Wagner wrote with Cosima's help, bring us up only to the end of the Wesendonck affair and his reconciliation with Minna. That tremendous record, filling three volumes in the original limited edition and the greater part of two heavy tomes in the English translation, covers only that period of his life which it was the intention of Wahnfried to minimize! When that work was done, it must have seemed to Cosima that this attempt to make the first part of Wagner's life seem only a prelude had turned out rather oddly. A

prelude in three volumes was somewhat long! But that record is exceeded by Ellis's translation of Glasenapp's biography, of which the six volumes end with the year 1859, twenty-four years before Wagner's death!

Cosima might be considered as much more likely than Wagner to have desired to explain the period when she came into his life. Wagner's apology was done when he had sufficiently slandered Minna. But Cosima's only began then. She had every reason for adding those last three years herself, which she could easily have done from her talks with Wagner, her own memory of that period, and his notebooks.

That is the case for Cosima's authorship of the Fourth Part. It is not at all improbable; yet we do not think that she was its author.

The reason is the internal evidence. There are episodes in the Fourth Part of "Mein Leben" that Cosima would never have narrated. Wagner's remarks about Frederike Meyer, for instance, or the story of his servant-girl's illness one night, would probably not have occurred to Cosima had she not been supplied by Wagner with material to put down. Probably his share in the work was simply to recount

incidents to Cosima which she afterwards put into her own language; but he was very likely their source.

Giving Wagner the credit (or more precisely the blame) for this fourth section, we must add that it has evidently suffered more from editing than the other three. There was no check on what Cosima might do to it; it shows evidence of suppressions, additions, and alterations. The truth about this fourth section probably is that Wagner furnished the material for it, Cosima set it down, and after his death altered it radically.

One thing to be noted immediately in the fourth section is the greater venom expressed against Minna. There was no reason for this, coming from Wagner. His bitterness against her should have been worked out in the dictation of the earlier parts. She was dead, his letters to Natalie after her death evidenced great tenderness still for the wife he had treated so badly, and he should have grown less vindictive, not more so, as time passed. Yet we find the Fourth Part, all of which must have been dictated long after her death (since it was not until after that date that the other three parts were printed) breathing of a greater

hatred than the first three. This is the hand of Cosima—altering.

We find again several instances of abrupt application of the brakes in the Fourth Part of "Mein Leben." At the opening of the Frederike Meyer section Wagner appears to be preparing to give us a circumstantial story of his relations with this lady. His account begins with a fullness of detail that recalls the Laussot and Wesendonck stories. But it stops short, which was not Wagner's usual method of concealing the facts. Ordinarily he is discursive, vague and long-winded, feeling the need for explanation and revelling in it until he has thwarted his own case by overdoing it. Cosima's method was better. Wagner had given her some material on Frederike Meyer. She left part of it in to refute possible outcroppings later of the gossip that was in everyone's mouth at the time; but not all. This is the hand of Cosima—suppressing.

Finally, in the Fourth Part, we find a sudden warmth and wealth of reference to Cosima herself, which has been conspicuously absent before. Wagner apparently had a certain delicacy about dictating praises and comments on his second wife to that very lady; she had

none about putting them down, as the Fourth Part of "Mein Leben" shows us, whoever we think wrote it. It is only natural that Cosima should play a larger part in this section of the book, for it was at this time that she began to play a larger part in his life. But Wagner's chronology is never so exact as to prevent him from referring backward and forward to events in the past or the future throughout his book. He does it frequently. But he makes no forward references to Cosima. With the very beginning of the fourth section, we find the character of this lady painted in glowing colours and Wagner's passion for her described at length; and his feelings seem quite different from those which he has displayed towards other women. This is the hand of Cosima—adding.

Why did Cosima desire to add those particular years, 1861 to 1864? The first was the critical year when the final separation of Wagner and Minna took place; it must be glossed over. The latter is the year when Ludwig II of Bavaria called Wagner to his Court, and Cosima, finding him established for life under the patronage of the King, immediately left her husband and went to Wagner. This,

too, requires glossing over. In the Fourth Part Cosima attempts to date forward her relations with Wagner so as to make it appear that his success came only *after* she joined him, for it is a part of the untenable theory that Wahnfried wishes to put forward that it was Cosima who was responsible for his success, whereas she only constituted herself a sort of secretary and business manager for him when she saw that he was in a position to have a business worth managing. Finally, there was no point in running the Fourth Part any further, up to the marriage of Cosima and Wagner in 1870, for instance, because that would only have emphasized the six years of irregularity, the illegitimacy of three children, the lack of consideration shown for Cosima's husband, and perhaps, also, the difference between Wagner's feeling for and life with his first wife and his second. 1861 and 1864 required explanation, but 1870 was better treated by silence. This was the correct way to handle the story from Cosima's view-point, and that is the way it was done. Cosima's hand lies heavily on the Fourth Part of "Mein Leben," if, indeed, it was not the only hand concerned in it.

It is 1859. Wagner is living in Paris, recklessly and feverishly. He is spending tremendous sums and incurring mountains of debt. Minna, appalled, is trying to save him from his extravagances. But he is not to be saved. He dives headlong into the most extravagant of all extravagances—a plenitude of women.

First in order appears to have been Cosima's elder sister, Blandine, wife of a Paris lawyer, Emile Ollivier, afterwards Premier of France. For a time she actually kept house for Wagner —with Minna living in the same establishment. It may have been she to whom Wagner was referring when he wrote to Mrs. Agnes Street-Klindworth (who is accused in "Mein Leben," without the slightest shred of evidence, of being both wife and daughter of Liszt's friend, Klindworth) that he was weary of his dependence on a woman who did him only harm. Or it might have been Minna. At this time Wagner was probably not very much in sympathy with his wife, who was trying to keep him from incurring new debts and who was very unlikely to have looked pleasantly upon Blandine's presence. Pauline Tichatscheck, wife of the famous singer, in a letter

which is now in the Burrell Collection, sympathized with Minna in her difficulties with her husband but advised patience with him—a virtue which, in Minna's case, had been necessarily exaggerated to the proportions of a vice.

Judging from the references to Blandine, vague as is usual when Wagner is hiding something, his interest in her began early in 1858, before the climax of the Wesendonck affair. The reason was typical. Blandine had just married Ollivier, in whom Wagner saw another potential patron, Otto Wesendonck apparently not being rich enough to supply all his rather extravagant wants. With characteristic incomprehension of the bluntness with which the phrase falls on ears attuned to greater delicacy Wagner says, in "Mein Leben": "As Liszt's elder daughter, Blandine, had recently married the famous lawyer, E. Ollivier, and I could consequently rely on substantial help from them, I made up my mind to go to Paris for a week." It does not appear that he knew Blandine well before this, but he felt, nevertheless, that since her husband had money, he could "rely" on getting some of it. He employed his usual tactics of extracting

money from the husband by making love to the wife.

A few pages later Blandine gets a paragraph all to herself. So often do we find that any woman whom Wagner mentions favourably was at one time his mistress that we can hardly be blamed for being suspicious if we feel that the list ought to be augmented by those of whom he approves in "Mein Leben," but for whose relations with him we have no other proof. "Blandine," Wagner says, "impressed me at the same time most favourably with her gentleness, her cheerfulness, and a certain quiet wit added to a quick mental perception. We very soon understood one another; the slightest suggestion sufficed to create a mutual understanding on any subject in which we were interested."

There are occasional references to Blandine from time to time and then we find Wagner remarking that he believed she was enceinte. In the ordinary biography such a sentence would mean nothing; but again and again we find that an apparently innocent remark on a point which ordinarily we should not expect to find in a record of Wagner's life covers a great deal of suppressed knowledge. There is no

reason why Blandine's pregnancy should have any place in the narrative of Wagner's life, unless for some reason he had a particular interest in her condition. This will undoubtedly seem to some readers to be stretching the possible hidden meanings too far; but the authors of the Autobiography have brought it on themselves by the constant concealment which has made guessing necessary. A close student of "Mein Leben" would be forced to admit that, in the light of other similarly innocent observations which we now know hide whole histories behind them, we are not unjustified in assuming that this particular sentence was forced into the Autobiography by the pressure behind it of much greater knowledge. In the case of Wagner's servant-girl we shall see a precisely similar allusion which veils an affair on which we have more complete information than Wagner gives us.

A few months later Blandine passed out of Wagner's life—indeed, out of everyone's. She died in childbirth.

The list of Wagner's loves now follows so breathlessly that it is practically impossible to enumerate them in any kind of order. Most of them, indeed, seem to have overlapped.

After leaving Paris, he settled down in Vienna, in the summer of 1861, and Dr. Standhartner, who was absent for some weeks, lent Wagner his house. A niece of the doctor's, one Seraphine Mauro, did the housekeeping. She was very pretty. "Wagner was not insensible to so much beauty in his daily surroundings, and his 'dear little doll,' as he always called Seraphine, did not let him sigh in vain," Kapp reports. Seraphine did not qualify by being the wife of a rich man who could help Wagner, but she did fall into the category of being attached to a friend of Wagner's, so that he could, as usual, have the pleasure of making a friend stand aside for him. The friend in this case was the devoted Peter Cornelius, who had been Seraphine's sweetheart until Wagner came along.

It must have been about the same time that he was engaged in captivating Malwina von Meysenberg, whom he had met in Paris in 1860; for the Burrell Collection contains a letter from her to Minna, undated, but evidently written about May, 1861, since it refers to the production of *Lohengrin* at Vienna, which took place on the 15th of that month. Wagner says of her in his Autobiography that

she "became a close friend for life." She raised money for him and was the only woman present at his marriage to Cosima. These last two details are *not* to be found in "Mein Leben."

Then there was Frederike Meyer, an actress, of whom we get several accounts in "Mein Leben," none of them admitting that she was any more than a not particularly close friend of Wagner's, but all concerning themselves with her private affairs rather more than would be expected from a man who was only a friend and nothing more. He probably became interested in Frederike as a sequel to her sister, Frau Dustmann, who was helping him, as so many other women had done, and, becoming angered when he took up with Frederike, ceased her aid. "Mein Leben" intimates that this is because Frau Dustmann misunderstood his relations with her sister, which, Wagner takes pains to assure us, were the acme of purity. It is more likely that Frau Dustmann was jealous. As for the purity of the liaison, we find Wagner taking a surprising amount of interest in Frederike's "protector," Herr von Guaita, and we know that the affair was much talked about at the time it was going on. Peter

Cornelius remarks in his diary: "Frederike isn't so bad as they make out at Mainz; she isn't amiss as far as appearances go. She is intelligent, without making any attempt to thrust herself forward. She is not very pretty, but her face is animated. Wagner behaved very properly and decently in her presence. If he really must have a liaison of this sort, it looks as if he would get on tolerably with this one."

Frederike had the misfortune to catch scarlet fever and lose her hair. That finished her so far as Wagner was concerned, and she returned to Herr von Guaita, who proved himself less villainous than Wagner seemed to think, for he married her.

The episodes of Seraphine and Frederike had not been profitable. For once Wagner had lost sight of the capacity of his lovers to help him. Alarmed for his pure professional standing, he wrote to his sister, Luise Brockhaus, asking her if she could not persuade Minna to divorce him so that he could marry a wealthy woman. This letter has conveniently disappeared from the collected edition of family letters. The rich woman in question was probably Henriette von Bissing, who had

just been left a widow, and a wealthy one. Wagner tried to get assistance from her later, and defeated his own efforts by too much importunity.

Wagner had taken a house at Penzing, and he decided that it ought to have a mistress. He therefore proposed to a pretty and intelligent young lady, Mathilde Maier, that she should take up residence with him. In the Autobiography he appears to be quite surprised that it was not generally understood that she was to act as housekeeper only; he seemed to think it quite an ordinary thing that a young lady should be invited to come and keep house for a man who felt the need of a capable servant without having at the same time the desire to pay her. He tells us that he thought Mathilde would be sensible enough to understand him without being shocked. But he had forgotten her "bourgeois family." Luise Brockhaus advised him to get a divorce first and a new wife afterwards, so that ended Wagner's plan of setting up a ménage with Mathilde. It did not, however, end the affair with her. This was evidently a rather important episode in his life, but it has been more cleverly hidden than the rest. Intimate letters and documents in Mathilde's

possession have long been held back, to be published after Cosima Wagner's death, which is in itself significant. It is to be hoped that they have been carefully guarded from the hands of Wahnfried; otherwise we shall never know anything more about the Maier affair than we know now.

Disappointed in his plan of providing himself with free domestic service by employing a lover as his housekeeper, Wagner decided to employ a servant as lover. The first girl he hired was somewhat young and inexperienced in the ways of the world, and apparently did not take kindly to the ideas of her elderly employer. So he discharged her and hired her elder sister, who was more amenable. The way he puts it in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck is as follows:

> Recently a maiden of seventeen years and unimpeachable birth was recommended to me as gentle, willing to serve, and uncorrupted; so I took her into my home, to dish me tea, look after my things, and be present at table and of an evening, God bless me, the trouble I had to get the poor child out of the house again without wounding her feelings!

> She was bored to death, longing for town again. . . . Now the elder sister of the girl sent home has applied to me; she is more experienced, staid, seems well-disposed, and isn't unagreeable.

Now what do we find about this girl in the Autobiography? There is a single paragraph in which Wagner expressed his alarm because one night cries were heard coming from her room, where she was found to be ill and hysterical. A report of the passing sickness of a servant is not autobiographical material any more than the observation of the pregnancy of a casual friend. This episode of the servant girl hides more behind it than it says. The illness of Wagner's servant impressed itself upon him because he had a guilty conscience in regard to her.

This is how we know what his relations were with Marie, the elder servant, who, according to Kapp, "had a better understanding (than her sister) of the position she was intended for, and gave Wagner thorough satisfaction." Here is Newman's translation of a letter from Wagner to his "servant"; it was discovered by Kapp.

DEAR LITTLE MARIE,

I shall be home again next Wednesday. . . . Now, my best sweetheart, have everything in the house very nice, so that I can get a cosy rest, which I very much need. Everything must be quite tidy and well warmed. See that everything is very nice in the lovely study; if it is hot, open it a little, so that the study may be warm; and perfume it nicely: *buy the best bottles of scent, so as to give it a nice odour.* Ach Gott! How delighted I am to be able to rest again with you there. (*I hope the rose-coloured pants are ready?*) Aye, aye! You must be very pretty and charming; I deserve to have a thoroughly good time once more. At Christmas I will arrange the Christmas tree; and then, my sweetheart, you will get all sorts of presents. . . . I leave it wholly to yourself as to whether you will meet me at the station. Perhaps it will be nicer if you meet me first in the house, in the warm rooms. . . . Many kisses to my sweetheart. Au revoir!

"This, perhaps," says Newman, "is scarcely the sort of letter one writes to a servant who is

no more than a servant." Also, we may add, it permits us again the possibility of an alternative reading, which adds strength to the belief that Minna, familiar with Richard's double meanings, could read more in the fatal letter to Mathilde Wesendonck than appears on the surface.

A little later, staying in Mariafeld, where he had fled from his creditors, and had arrived almost without warning at the house of Frau Wille, where he demanded to be put up, he probably indulged himself in an affair with this lady also. For on the return of Dr. Wille he was forced to leave. Dr. Wille not unreasonably remarked, in a phrase which, as reported by Wagner, makes us hark back to Eugène Laussot and Otto Wesendonck, that "a man wanted . . . to be something more than a cipher in his own house." So Richard left, subsequently writing to Frau Wille with allusions to "that stormy night of fever that no rising sun came to brighten."

This was the end of Wagner's difficulties, for immediately after leaving Mariafeld he received a message from Ludwig II, the mad king of Bavaria. Commentators are not lacking to add Ludwig to the list of Wagner's

conquests. That is a subject into which we do not propose to go. It is enough to say that the favour of the Mad King put Wagner on the road to prosperity. He was virtual master of Bavaria and wielded so great an influence that he impoverished the kingdom by the extent of his personal expenditure. Those who wish to probe the deep springs of this influence are invited to read the authorities for themselves, and especially look up Wagner's letters to Frau Wille, written after he had met Ludwig. They should be read in the original, for Ashton Ellis's translations have toned down their passion until they are almost—but not quite—beyond suspicion.

From the tale of this brief but pyrotechnic period (for all these affairs took place between 1861 and 1863) we may deduce a few facts about Wagner's amorous relations. He does not appear to have been a great amorist. He was a great actor, seeing himself always in the centre of the boards in the glow of the spotlight, and thus always ready to proffer the proper height of passion to women who came on the stage. But he could hardly do it at first sight, for he had not the necessary appearance. He worked his way gradually into a woman's

affections by playing upon two themes—his greatness as an artist, his financial helplessness. That, perhaps, explains why almost all his lovers were stolen from others; he came into contact with them through his friends, and was kept in touch with them until his methods had had time to attain their object. There were no cases of love at first sight in Wagner's history.

Three times, perhaps, he approcahed a sincerity in his amorous relations which he could never entirely attain because of his self-centredness. First with Minna, for whom he demonstratively felt great affection for many years; then, perhaps, for Mathilde Wesendonck; finally, and more doubtfully, for Mathilde Maier. Of that last case we cannot be sure until the missing documents are produced.

For the rest of the time, he never forgot for long that he desired success and comfort. Doubtless, he managed to play the part of a frantic lover (witness the Laussot affair) to his own illusion; but it was always when there was some ulterior object. He used his lovers to provide him with personal luxuries, for which his taste was insatiable, and to promote his operas. The two must almost be considered the

same thing, for Wagner and his work are inseparable. It was a part of his self-indulgence to press always for the production of his operas in the manner in which he wished them to be produced.

He made of his passions a means for gratifying his other desires. That is not to say that the passions themselves were simulated. He was a man of great appetite. He chose primarily women who could help him; but, as this last hectic period shows, given the opportunity, he sought out other women also. For two years he indulged himself in what cannot be described otherwise than as libertinage. The close to that chapter of his life was Cosima.

CHAPTER IX

GREEK MEETS GREEK

COSIMA LISZT was the daughter of the great virtuoso and the Countess Marie d'Agoult, *née* Viscountess de Flavigny. She was more truly the daughter of the latter than of the former. In Cosima there was none of the gentleness and kindness that distinguished her noted father; she descended more directly from her imperious mother, who had caught Liszt by sheer force against his own will.

Franz Liszt seems to have been congenitally incapable of refusing anyone anything, of causing anyone the slightest pain, of contributing in any way to unpleasantness. Women were always able to do what they liked with him because he could not bring himself to oppose them in any way. The Countess d'Agoult made Liszt live with her long enough to have three children. Then she tired of him and permitted him to escape, to his great relief. Her second daughter, Cosima, was equally strong-willed, and overrode her father quite as easily as her mother used to do. There are more than

a few instances, in the relations of Liszt and his daughter, of her cold-blooded treatment. Cosima was quite capable of putting her father in his place, but he was never able to summon up courage to tell her what he really thought of her.

Cosima's mother possessed the same forceful will that distinguished the daughter. Liszt met her first when she was on bad terms with her husband, Count Charles d'Agoult, and was writing under the name of Daniel Stern—a characteristic choice of pseudonym. Liszt was not much impressed by the lady. She was not accustomed to anything but adulation from men, and Liszt's coldness was particularly annoying because he was the great social lion of the day. She immediately set to work to ensnare him, though with indifferent success.

Having failed by ordinary means she played a trump card. She divorced her husband, after creating a situation which coupled her name with Liszt's in the mouths of the Society gossips of that day. Feeling that he was going to be forced to enter upon a liaison which he was far from desiring, Liszt gathered up his belongings and fled. As soon as her decree was obtained, the Countess gathered up hers, which

were far more voluminous (the extent of her wardrobe was proverbial) and followed him. There was no escape. Liszt had to live with her, but he always managed to escape marriage.

Blandine was the first child of this partnership, born in 1835. Cosima, the second, was born in 1837—thus being within a few months of twenty-five years younger than Wagner, whom she was afterwards to marry. Daniel, the last child, died at the age of twenty.

Liszt legitimized his children, but he never legitimized his wife. He stayed with her until 1844; then the break came, brought on chiefly by her extravagance. Characteristically Liszt took the least theatrical course; he provided for his children and slipped quietly away. This time the Countess did not follow.

There is a striking resemblance between the methods of the Countess and those of her more famous daughter. Both set out to ensnare a certain man and both succeeded. But Cosima kept her prey, while her mother lost Liszt. Both were attracted to the men they wanted by the glitter of success—Liszt was the most famous man in his circle when the Countess met him, Wagner was the most notorious in his when Cosima's interest in him reached its

height. Both ruthlessly divorced a first husband to capture the men they wanted. Both possessed a force of character that made them push forward to the accomplishment of their aim regardless of the opinions of others.

If the women were alike, the men were the most complete opposites that could be imagined. Liszt was easy prey for any determined woman. He could not say, "No." But Wagner had been a hunter himself. His method had always been to make women with money—or with wealthy husbands—lose their heads about him. Cosima played his own game and beat him at it. Not that she made him lose his head over her. She played more slowly and more carefully than that. She wove a net about him from which he was finally unable to escape. We will examine this technique in detail in a moment.

We must first go back to the beginning of Wagner's association with this woman, who was described by Wallace as "long-nosed and pert, inviting, as one would say of a naughty child, a good slapping."

In 1857, at the age of twenty, Cosima married Hans von Bülow, a gifted young conductor, a protégé of Liszt and a friend of Richard

Wagner. Von Bülow's loyalty to Wagner, which included giving up his wife to him, was most remarkable. After Cosima left him for Wagner he continued to sponsor the latter's compositions just as he had done before. Long before Wagner was famous von Bülow had recognized the importance of his music, and it was partly to him that Wagner owed the growing acceptance of his works that resulted in the summons to the Court of the Mad King, which was the beginning of his fortune. For this Wagner repaid him by taking his wife.

If we listen to the voices of Wahnfried we shall hear nothing but praise for Cosima. We shall hear that, after a long life of poverty with Minna, pictured as the weight about his neck which held him down, Cosima threw in her lot with his, and his fortune was immediately made. A careful scrutiny of the dates will reverse the order of these facts and we shall discover that *after* Wagner's fortune was made by his invitation to the Bavarian Court, Cosima suddenly found herself impelled to leave her husband (who was extremely poor, a circumstance to which Cosima, brought up in Liszt's household, was not accustomed) and join Wagner. She was twenty-five years his junior.

If we remember these two facts—that Cosima was leaving a poor and comparatively unknown, though very worthy man, for a rich, successful and famous one, and that Wagner was leaving a faithful and devoted wife four years his senior for a young girl twenty-five years younger than he was, we may be able to pierce through the romantic glow that Wahnfried has thrown upon this episode, and see it in its true sordidness.

Cosima Liszt married Hans von Bülow in 1857. There are one or two casual references to her in the first three parts of "Mein Leben," but it is not until the doubtful Fourth Part that she appears with any prominence. Then, almost at the beginning of that section, we find the first hint of what is to come. "I added with jesting familiarity," Wagner reports, " 'There was no necessity for him (von Bülow) to marry Cosima.' And Liszt added, bowing slightly, 'That was a luxury.' "

There are references to Seraphine, Frederike, Blandine, and Wagner's servant-girl (to say nothing of Minna with whom, up to the present —1861—Wagner still proposes to remain) and then we come to Cosima again. "While I was singing 'Wotan's Abschied' to my friends,"

Wagner says, "I noticed the same expression on Cosima's face as I had seen on it, to my astonishment, in Zurich on a similar occasion, only the ecstasy was transfigured into something higher. Everything connected with this was shrouded in silence and mystery, but the belief that she belonged to me grew to such certainty in my mind, that when I was under the influences of more than ordinary excitement my conduct betrayed the most reckless gaiety. As I was accompanying Cosima to the hotel across a public square, I suddenly suggested she should sit in an empty wheelbarrow which stood in the street, so that I might wheel her to the hotel. She assented in an instant. My astonishment was so great that I felt all my courage desert me, and was unable to carry out my mad project." Stupid would seem a better word than mad.

His next meeting with Cosima was equally boisterous. A young musician named Weisheimer was good enough to place two of Wagner's compositions on a programme of his own works. Wagner repaid him for the courtesy by going to the concert with Cosima, where the two of them disturbed the audience by laughing and disporting themselves all through the

performance of the unfortunate young man's programme. Wagner was surprised because, as a result of his gross behaviour, "my friend Weisheimer, who had really tired everyone's patience in the most inconsiderate way (by playing his own works instead of Wagner's), afterwards developed a feeling of dissatisfaction towards me which dated from this period."

But we have not yet come to the most important Cosima episode. It was necessary to dispose of Minna first, for it must not appear that Cosima came on the scene before Minna was definitely off it. Minna, Wagner says, bitterly reproached him for everything he did —and as he was at this time passing through his period of libertinage, she had every right to do so. "Having made up my mind never to answer her again, I wrote this time to her daughter Natalie." The reader is left to believe that this marks the end of Wagner's correspondence with Minna, and as the letters to Minna in the official edition are cut off with 1863, we have no way of knowing that he really continued to write to her for another three years —that is, until a few weeks before her death.

The letter to which Wagner refers is in the Burrell Collection. Cosima, who has dated

what Bayreuth refers to as her "moral crisis" back to 1861, should find the contents of this letter disconcerting, for it proves that in 1863, at least, Wagner had no intention of marrying anyone else. He does announce, as he tells us in his Autobiography, his intention of living no longer with Minna, but he will remain faithful to her. "She will always be my wife," he writes. "I shall remain alone and nobody will take her place. . . . Experience has taught me that for us to live together would mean the greatest unhappiness." And then, harping upon one of his favourite themes: "My fate is loneliness and my life is work." He said just about the same thing when he was planning to elope with Jessie Laussot.

With Minna out of the way, according to the Autobiography, the way is clear for Cosima to come in. Towards the latter part of 1863 we have a scene wherein Cosima and Richard are driving together. "This time all our jocularity died away into silence. We gazed speechless into each other's eyes; an intense longing for an avowal of the truth mastered us and led to a confession—which needed no words—of the boundless unhappiness which oppressed us." Thus we seem to have the beginning of the

affair with Cosima moved forward to 1863; but it was not serious enough to keep him from leaving her when he fled to Mariafeld, to escape his creditors as usual. Then he was ejected by Dr. Wille, who was surprised to return home and find Wagner calmly usurping the attentions of his household and his wife. Leaving Mariafeld, Wagner was followed by the messenger from the King of Bavaria. He put him off over night, thinking him a pursuing creditor. The next morning he received the message from the King. His fortune was assured.

This occurred on May 4, 1864. Up to this time, whatever Wahnfried may claim as to Cosima's relations with Wagner, we know positively that she had not abandoned her husband for him. Immediately upon his success, she threw in her lot with his. It was not a difficult thing to do. Wagner was at that time ready to take up with any woman who offered. Cosima offered. She knew better than the others how to hold the advantage once gained.

Cosima's mother had put Liszt under an obligation by divorcing a husband of whom she was in any case tired, presumably for the musician's sake. Cosima went one step farther and created an obligation for Wagner by bearing him a

child. That there should be no doubt about its paternity she named it Isolde. Von Bülow, trying desperately to save his wife's honour, claimed paternity; Wagner, less interested in Cosima's technical standing as a spotless matron, claimed it also. In a lawsuit which took place in 1915, Cosima claimed that Wagner was the father of Isolde, and incidentally gave away her case as the supporter of Wagner's adversity by dating the beginning of her relations with him in June, 1864—one month after his call from the King. It was rather quick work. There can be no doubt that Isolde, born in 1865, was actually the child of Richard Wagner.

Cosima now had a point to urge against Minna. She had never borne her husband a child, and Wagner himself, perhaps under Cosima's influence, constantly bewails that fact in his Autobiography. Ellis follows his lead and succeeds in making Minna a hardened criminal on this single point alone. What neither of them mentions is that Minna was rendered incapable of bearing children by internal injuries sustained on the boat in which they fled from Riga—a hardship which was the direct result of Wagner's extravagance and improvidence.

Cosima had now attached Wagner to her by the strongest possible bond. That gentle person, her father, was aghast at the wrong she had done her husband and the decisiveness with which she pursued Wagner. To his remonstrances Cosima opposed only the cynical retort, "*Da capo al segno*," and Liszt, looking back on his own history, was silent.

Another example of Cosima's extraordinary coldness towards her father was furnished when, at Wagner's death, Liszt, who had, during his lifetime, been his greatest benefactor, who had been milked dry by Wagner both of money and musical ideas, received no word from his daughter, but from sources inspired by her was expressly asked not to go to the funeral. Only a month later he received another communication from the suppression factory of Wahnfried, which she headed, when the work of acquiring Wagner's letters and destroying or distorting them was already in full blast. This time he was asked to turn over all Wagner's letters which were in his hands. "I will give up none of them," he answered.

Perhaps Cosima knew better than Wagner what was her father's real opinion of the man whom he had aided for so many years because

he recognized the genius of the musician. When the news was brought to Liszt of Wagner's death, he was writing. Calmly continuing his work, he said casually, "Indeed?" and a few minutes later added, "People are always telling me that he's very ill or dead. It's all nonsense." He showed no sign of any emotion even when the report was confirmed. But that mighty twisted shadow must have flung itself across his brain, for the last word he uttered before his own death was the one which summed up Wagner in his relations to all the world, in particular to Liszt's daughter: "Tristan!"

The birth of Isolde, in 1865, increased Cosima's influence over Wagner. It was in the latter part of this year that he finally wrote to Minna, definitely breaking off correspondence with her.

Meanwhile von Bülow's position was a strange one. At Wagner's request he had sent his wife and his own child to live with Wagner. Wagner, to insure the continuance of Cosima's company, had obtained for von Bülow a position as Court pianist. This was before the birth of Isolde. It was not difficult for Wagner to arrange for so trifling a favour. He was in the

good graces of the King, and was draining the coffers of Bavaria to the last pfennig. In the autumn of 1865 he demanded no less than 40,000 gulden at one fell swoop; the King insisted that it should be granted, and the Treasurer revenged himself by paying the money in silver coin and refusing to send it, so that Cosima herself had to go and carry the sacks openly through the town to her husband.

By this time everybody except von Bülow seems to have known what was going on. How he could have failed to believe in his wife's infidelity is difficult to see, especially in the light of Cosima's later declaration, when Isolde's paternity was in doubt, that she had lived in intimate relations with no one but Wagner during the preceding year. If we are to believe Kapp's account (and he is generally accurate, having no axe to grind), von Bülow remained ignorant of Wagner's reason for desiring to have Cosima in his house, ignorant of the reason for his appointment as Court pianist, ignorant of the real paternity of Isolde (though Wagner claimed her as his own!) and ignorant of the reason why, when Minna died on January 25, 1866, Cosima went to Geneva to stay with Wagner, although Richard had ex-

pressly told her not to do so when she wired and asked if she should join him. It is interesting to remember that it was Cosima who pursued Wagner, not Wagner Cosima, in this case demonstrably, in others presumably.

It is difficult to believe that von Bülow could have been so blind. He must have been trying desperately to save appearances; and the letter to Cosima which he opened on May 12, 1866, did not, as Kapp says, reveal to him the truth, but simply stirred him to the point of doing something. He discussed their relations with Cosima, who told him that she had no intention of returning from a rich lover to a poor husband. She wanted a divorce. Von Bülow was willing, but wanted Cosima first to stay two years with her father to save appearances. Cosima refused even this concession. She probably feared losing Wagner if she failed to bind him at once.

As a matter of fact it required six years of life with Wagner and the birth of two more children to attach her to him entirely. If Wagner had been willing to marry, von Bülow could no doubt have been as easily persuaded to a divorce in 1866 as in 1870. In 1867, a second child, Eva, was born, and in 1869 a

third, Siegfried. Wagner was delighted at the appearance of a son. That may have enabled Cosima finally to bring him to the point of marriage, and thus provided the reason for demanding a divorce from von Bülow. He divorced Cosima on July 18, 1870. The pair of lovers were married a month later.

In the meantime, there was plenty of evidence of Cosima's growing influence, which culminated in the marriage. At Minna's death we find him writing again of his fidelity to her, while at the same time, with an eye, as always, to posterity, he asks for the return of his letters to her. Then Cosima begins working with him on the Autobiography, welding together the new tradition, magnifying his own too partial view, building up, by the deft use of sympathy and suggestion, a view of his past life which Wagner was only too ready to accept. Minna tried to shake him out of his self-pitying, self-aggrandizing one-sided view of things; Cosima encouraged him in it, and between them they produced the psychopathic masterpiece of the Autobiography—a work which bears the unmistakable signs of paranoia.

That Cosima exercised a strong influence over others was evidenced later, when the undoubted

force of her character was applied to those about her. The whole circle of Bayreuth, the entire Wagnerian coterie, was brought round to her view. They interpreted the life of the Meister as Cosima wished them to see it. Her task was easy with men like Ellis, hero-worshippers who were themselves so incapable of understanding the genius they revered, once the stamp of success had made it plain even to their dull vision, that they were easily led to put down Cosima's views under the ecstatic influence of a smile from so high a quarter. But she had no need of easy subjects; her influence made itself felt even upon Wagner, who was far from being weak-willed himself, and who was more likely to impose his views on others than to accept them.

After four years with Cosima, Wagner had reached the stage where he was able to threaten Natalie with the withdrawal of her allowance unless Minna's important letters were returned. Thus Cosima came into possession of what she thought was the chief evidence against her case.

It is now that she begins to cut Wagner off from his old friends—friends who knew and admired Minna as well as her husband, friends associated with the period of his life that she

wished to crowd into the background. We begin to find Cosima handling all Wagner's correspondence. Even letters to his oldest and dearest friend Kietz are from Cosima rather than from Wagner himself. The last is dated September 6, 1870—that is to say, less than two weeks after the marriage. Of it the catalogue says, "Kietz was . . . the strongest surviving link with the past and Minna. Cosima, therefore, gives him the coldest of cold shoulders." Kietz took the hint. There was no more correspondence between those two old friends.

From that time Cosima had things her own way. The glitter and luxury of Bayreuth came into being and Wagner was exalted as the great master of music—who had ceased producing! For in all his life with Cosima he conceived no new work, succeeding only, in the thirteen years that elapsed before his death, in finishing *Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal*, both of which had been long ago completed in his mind. Cosima lived and basked in the midst of this grandeur. She was its guiding spirit and created the legend which set this barren period at the top of Wagner's life-story as its crown and climax, instead of its degenerate close. In that

legend, she shines as the helpmate of the great Wagner, and the memory of Minna is not so much forgotten as maligned.

What Cosima actually did was deserving of admiration, but from another view-point. She joined battle with a man who had built his successes on the ability to capitalize his affairs with women; and she built hers by capitalizing her affair with him. Greek had met Greek.

CHAPTER X

MINNA VERSUS COSIMA

THE trial of Minna has already taken place. It was conducted before a packed jury in a court of which Cosima was at once judge and prosecuting attorney. Decision was not unnaturally given for the plaintiff, in a minutely detailed verdict. No dissenting opinion was published.

We are engaged now in rehabilitation proceedings. New evidence has come to light, and its examination brings us to the conclusion that the case must be reopened and a new verdict rendered. Let us examine, one by one, the charges against Minna and determine which of the two women has the greater right to take her place by the side of Richard Wagner.

The first charge is that Wagner was forced, almost unwillingly, into marriage with Minna; that he did not love her and that she never loved him. We have already seen that it was he who importuned her to marry him, and that she finally did so against her better judgment. When, according to the official account, he was

trying not to become entangled in the snares she was spreading for him, what he was really doing was writing her the letters from which the following extracts are taken—letters hitherto unpublished, but now included in the Burrell Collection:

> Ah, alas—Minna—I could scream aloud with misery and pain! . . . To do without you another three months is simply impossible—for where is the possibility that I could endure? Either you must come to me, or I to you. . . . I entreat you once more, *make every effort* that I may come to you soon—so that we can marry *soon* and end this state of misery!—Yesterday the whole story of our love touched my heart—beginning with our first meeting at Leuchstadt until now;—it is said—that love is more glowing and ardent in the beginning—but where, during the whole period of two years that we have already loved each other (the date of this letter is May 29, 1836), do I find again such a state as the present one, this fiery passion and fretting? No, never will anybody love again as I love, *and I am still to be away from you for three months!!*—

No, no—don't believe it, Minna—a miracle shall, it must happen—why should the Creator wish to deprive me of life?

My heart is always in anguish, I always feel it is going to break! when anybody wishes to make me laugh, I cry,—ah, and the restlessness of the night, every morning I am roused from my sleep as with a tremor of my heart; thoughts, hundreds of ideas whirl through my mind, as if I had already been awake a whole day. Minna, thus we are wasting our youth! Do end this state, I have already suffered too much!

Minna,—fate is more than cruel,—it is treating us scandalously,—we who are forgetting everything around us just to belong to each other;—is it not as if fate were ridiculing our love?—And *our* love, what is equal to it?—Oh, to have you with me *now*, *now*, to feel you, to submerge into your glance, to be wedded to your darling body,—dissolving all my woe in one beautiful embrace!—Oh, God in heaven, do you feel as passionately as I do?

I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it,—I seriously fear a mental breakdown,—I cannot endure it, . . . I must be with you.

> Though honour, fame, gold and splendour may be in store for me here, the burden is crushing me,—because *this* you must know, girl, *no one* has ever *loved* before as I, *no one* has *ever* been *loved as you!* . . . Oh, why must I cry farewell to you! Why can't I kiss you until I die!

This much will suffice to dispose of the statement that Wagner did not love Minna and that it was she who pursued him. As for her feelings towards him, we have already seen the letter in which she told a friend of her inability to live without her husband; and though we had not seen that letter, we might guess from Minna's many sacrifices for her husband, from her tender care for him, from her welcome as he returned from each of his flights to another charmer, from her final gallant defence of him just before she died of a broken heart because of his treatment of her, that however great the love he gave her, it was amply returned. The official publications of Wagner's letters stress those in which he accuses Minna of not loving him. This is the sort of a reproof that occurs only to a lover; a man who does not love his wife does not suffer for fear that she does not

love *him* sufficiently; and the lover's reproof is never to be taken at its face value. Wagner loved Minna and she loved him.

There is, on the other hand, no reason for believing that he loved Cosima, that there was any feeling stronger than the physical attraction that many women had for him, aided by youth and her undoubtedly strong personality. She was the end of a long series of adventures; there is no reason to believe that it was by Wagner's wish that she became the last, instead of only one of the series. Whereas Wagner pursued Minna from the moment he met her, bombarding her with entreaties that succeeded only after two years of effort, he resisted Cosima for six years before marrying her. The answer to this will be, of course, that he was unable to marry her until von Bülow had secured a divorce; but von Bülow might have done that earlier if Wagner had desired to marry his wife.

Another charge levelled with great regularity against Minna is that she gave Wagner no children. Minna was herself quite as fond of them as anyone else, and she would certainly have enjoyed more pleasure and happiness with them in the home than with her irascible hus-

band alone. It is implied that Minna might have had children, but did not wish for a family. Thus the charge of practising birth control, more awful in those days than it is now, was levelled at her. We have already explained that her childlessness resulted from an internal injury during the flight from Riga, the result of Wagner's improvidence. It is not recorded that she ever uttered a complaint about her husband for this reason. He would have done well to have been equally magnanimous.

A third charge is that Minna was an unassuming bourgeoise, fit only to be the housewife of a petty clerk and not the companion of a great man. There might be considerable argument as to whether great men could stand the continuous presence of an equal, or nearly equal intelligence; we might even go further and point out that the artist is as likely to be as unintelligent outside of his own sphere as any other man. But all this would be going far afield, and it is hardly necessary.

Minna was not a woman of brilliance and glitter, not a woman whose whole effort was devoted, like Cosima's, to shining in the empty circles of Society. She was charming and far more profound than Cosima; she had remark-

able native intelligence; as proof of her special capabilities for understanding Wagner's work we have his own testimony that only Minna remarked his employment of trombones in a certain piece of orchestration—and no other woman ever appears to have understood what Wagner the musician was about well enough to have made any equally intelligent observation on his musical technique.

Minna was an actress, and an actress of some renown, with a successful career opening ahead when Wagner met her. It is not characteristic of actresses to hold too strictly to the bourgeois morality, and Minna's later behaviour, in face of her husband's philandering, was proof that she was above it. He himself does not seem to have been so, to judge from the jealous attitude he took towards any man who looked twice at the handsome young actress.

Minna became a housewife and slaved at it; she had to do so to care for Wagner. She may have aged more quickly than she would have done otherwise, as a result of the hardships endured during her long life with her husband. But that she impressed others as being far more than a housewife is obvious from the reactions of all the persons who knew the Wagners. His

old friend, the artist Kietz, seems, indeed, to have been a better friend and a greater admirer of Minna than of her husband. Taking advantage of Wagner's utter absence of a sense of humour, he often slyly hinted as much in little sketches which he made, such as the one showing Minna spanking Wagner, a hit at the maternal attitude which she was sometimes forced to adopt to curb her husband's extravagances. At such times as the Laussot episode and the final break-up of the family, Kietz was in correspondence with Minna and sympathized with her.

If we look in the official publications we shall find it stated that Wagner's family did not like Minna, but that hers was delighted at her catch. This is one of the many outright falsehoods which distinguish Wahnfried's work. The difficulties were all the other way. Minna's family did not wish her to marry Wagner, and he himself talks of persuading her mother into withdrawing her objections to their union. When Minna left him for the first time, she returned to her family, which was distinctly chilly towards Wagner when he came to look for her.

His family, on the contrary, was charmed

with Minna. Despite Wagner's constant assertions, towards the end of his Autobiography, that his sisters were on his side, in the Burrell Collection we find letters from them to Minna, sympathizing with her, blaming Wagner, and seeking to patch matters up. Their opinion of Cosima, on the evidence of Natalie, was far from favourable.

The family question occupies a great deal of attention in the works of some writers on Wagner—notably Ellis. This gentleman makes out a most complete case for Wagner's sufferings at the hands of Minna's family. He represents him as having generally supported them —although most of the time he was not even able to support his wife, so that she was driven to the most humiliating devices to make both ends meet. That Wagner gave substantial aid to his wife's relations is a supremely fantastic idea.

Ellis's argument depends on two threads. One is Natalie. He speaks as though Wagner supported Natalie all the time he was living with Minna. Natalie was Minna's daughter; Wagner knew all about her, and accepted the responsibility for her before marriage. It is not generally considered unreasonable for a man

who marries a woman with a child to take care of that child. As a matter of fact, Wagner's poverty made it necessary for Natalie to remain much of the time with Minna's mother, so that it was Minna's family that was helping to support Wagner rather than the reverse.

Ellis's second thread is one which he himself might have known was rotten. His story is that when Minna returned to Wagner at Riga, after first leaving him, she brought her sister Amalie with her. He then allows us to believe that she remained a more or less permanent attachment to the Wagner household, though he does hint vaguely that there was no room for her when the Wagners were in such reduced circumstances in Paris. Amalie's visit to her sister and brother-in-law was made at the invitation of Wagner himself, who happened to meet Amalie after Minna had left him, and asked her to come to Riga and bring Minna with her. Wagner's method of winning his wife back is thus construed as a move on Minna's part to put the burden of the support of her sister on his shoulders. Amalie stayed with the Wagners in Riga for a time, and when she married and left the household the loss of the amount she had been contributing to the

common exchequer proved a serious embarrassment.

Minna is painted as a drag on Wagner; Cosima as the woman who brought him to wealth and fame. What is the truth? It is that Minna stayed loyally by her husband in the years of poverty and want, and prevented him from being totally submerged by his own improvidence and extravagance. When he won security, through the patronage of the King of Bavaria, then, and not until then, was Cosima willing to share his lot. Minna came to the poor artist, who could have had for her no other attraction than his own character; Cosima came to the famous musician, protégé of a king, sure of wealth. Wahnfried has done the case no good by dwelling upon the material differences between these two periods of Wagner's life.

Minna, we are told, did not understand the importance of Wagner's art. Cosima is presumed to have understood it. What Cosima recognized was *success;* she was no more equipped to comprehend Wagner's music completely than was anyone else in those days. If there had been another living person capable of understanding Wagner's music thoroughly *at*

the time he wrote it, that person would himself have been its composer. Von Bülow, Cosima's husband, was one of those who came near understanding it. He felt its greatness so thoroughly that he gave up to Wagner everything, including his wife. Cosima must have heard of Wagner's greatness from her husband, morning, noon, and night. She knew he was a great musician, but she knew it second-hand.

This is not necessarily to say that Minna understood Wagner's music. She may have been a very bad judge of music, though some of her comments on her husband's work are sound enough. But she knew the man, and she knew where his future lay. During the long dull period at Zurich, when Wagner failed to compose, although the *Nibelungen Lied* was smouldering in his brain, Minna urged him to stop his writing, his strutting, attitudinizing parade of his ideas on paper, and get to composing. She knew that that was his real work. He was annoyed at her emphasis on this point, and records his annoyance in the Autobiography, but let anyone plough through the ponderous misty sentences of Wagner's dull prose works and then listen to even the least of his operas and

say whether he would not exchange every line Wagner ever wrote for one more opera.

Cosima, on the contrary, urged Wagner to write. The disputes which he carried on in the press, the dissemination of his name more swiftly and to wider circles than his music could carry it (for the appeal of such music was necessarily limited at first to very few, and those the people to whom glitter was not the greatest good of life)—this appealed to Cosima. It was bad for the development of the artist and the man also, as Minna well knew, for she realized how easily this sort of thing could spoil Wagner and turn him into the egoistic, self-indulgent person he actually became with Cosima's help. She did, indeed, draft a letter to him after they were definitely separated, protesting against the effect Court life was having on him. If she ever sent it there is no record from Wahnfried of its effect.

Commentators brought up in the Wahnfried tradition have a habit of giving Cosima credit for keeping Wagner in the state of repose that was necessary for the completion of his great works. If names are insisted upon they can mention only two for the later period—*Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal*. These two would

be enough—but they do not belong to that period. Cosima is praised for having provided the atmosphere in which the *Ring* could be completed; she should get the blame for deferring its being committed to paper until so late a date that the world nearly missed it. *Götterdämmerung* was the first, not the last, of the *Ring* dramas to be conceived. It was planned under the title of *Siegfried's Death*. Realizing that there was necessity for preliminary explanation, Wagner framed *Siegfried*, first entitled *Young Siegfried*, to precede the other opera. That, too, needed introducing. So we were offered *The Valkyrie*, and finally the *Rhinegold*. *Parsifal* likewise was planned at an earlier period and merely put down on paper during the Cosima régime.

Here is the chronology of the Wagnerian operas demonstrating that the great period of creative activity was in the turbulent life of hardship that Wagner led with his first wife, rather than in the haven of success and adulation shared by his second.

Rienzi was begun in 1838, two years after his marriage with Minna. *The Flying Dutchman* had been conceived during the first year. The former was finished in 1840 and produced at

Dresden in 1842. The latter was finished in 1841, and produced in 1843, also at Dresden. *Tannhäuser*, planned in 1842, was finished in 1844, and produced in Dresden the following year.

That was a year of great activity for Wagner. Besides finishing the scoring of *Tannhäuser* and directing its production, sketches were begun for *Lohengrin*, and *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* conceived. *Lohengrin* was finished in 1848, scoring and all.

In 1848 the poem of *Siegfried's Death*, later to be known as *Götterdämmerung*, was written. Liszt gave *Lohengrin* its first production at Weimar, in 1850. In 1851 the poem of *Young Siegfried*, later renamed simply *Siegfried*, was written. In the following year *The Valkyrie* and *Rhinegold* were written, and the two earlier poems recast to fit in with the new scheme. When upholders of the Bayreuth tradition point to *Götterdämmerung* as a great work made possible by the peace Cosima gave her husband, it is interesting to remember that in 1852, eighteen years before he was to marry her, the complete book of the *Nibelungen Ring* had been published! The music to the *Rhinegold* was finished two years later.

While working on the music of *The Valkyrie*, in 1854, the idea of *Tristan and Isolde* intruded itself. In the plot of this opera we find Wagner himself, Mathilde and Otto Wesendonck. Mathilde's influence on the composition of this work cannot be put aside. But it is to be noted that *Tristan* was conceived while he had still three years to live in harmony with Minna, before the breaking out of the Wesendonck affair. Mathilde may have inspired Wagner in the composition of *Tristan* (though his chief inspiration was himself, the woes of Tristan being considerably more real to him than those of Isolde, while King Mark never becomes a living figure), but it was in the atmosphere provided by Minna that he produced that work. That is what we are presently concerned with. Luckily for her, Cosima's greatest champions do not insist that she inspired either *Götterdämmerung* or *Parsifal*, but only that she provided the setting in which they could be worked out. By the same token Minna deserves part of the credit for *Tristan*.

In 1855 *The Valkyrie* had been completely scored, and Wagner was working on the music of *Siegfried*. The following year saw the first and part of the second act of *Siegfried* finished,

the poem of *Tristan* completed, as well as the music for the prelude and the first act, and the idea of *Parsifal* again taking shape. The Wesendonck excitement seems to have slowed him up somewhat; *Tristan* was not finished until August, 1859.

Now we come to the pre-Cosima period. He and Minna are living apart. The poem of *Die Meistersinger* is written. The composition of the music is begun. This is 1862. Things move slowly now. Ludwig has not yet appeared on the scene and without the help of Minna, Wagner has little time for work. Then, in 1864, Ludwig calls Wagner to the Court of Bavaria. In 1865, Isolde von Bülow, Wagner's daughter, is born, and von Bülow, with perhaps conscious irony, directs the first performance of Tristan.

Siegfried is again taken up, as is *Parsifal*. *Die Meistersinger* is finished in 1867, and produced, under von Bülow, the following year. *Siegfried* is finished in 1869, and the *Rhinegold* produced. The second act of *Götterdämmerung* is completed in 1870, the year of his marriage to Cosima. The marriage is followed by a noticeable slowing up of production. The third act requires two years to finish and two

more to score, probably because Cosima was more anxious that the falsified version of her husband's relation with his first wife should be published than that his musical work should progress.

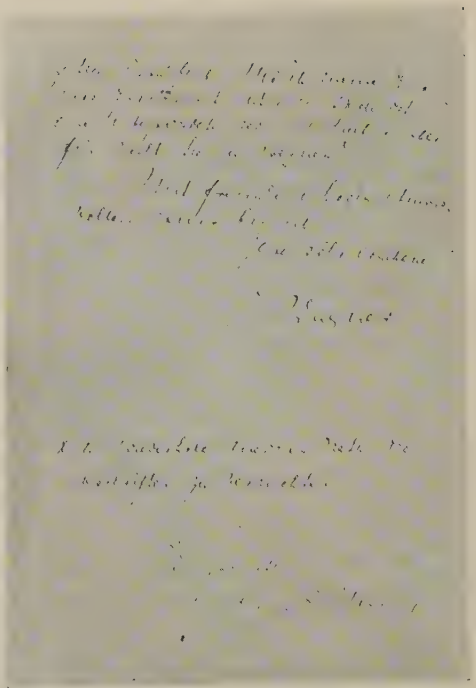
The poem of *Parsifal* was written in 1877 —the year after the first performance of the entire *Ring* at Bayreuth. The music was finished two years later and the scoring three years later. It was produced the same year, 1882. He had only one year of life; *Parsifal* was his swan song.

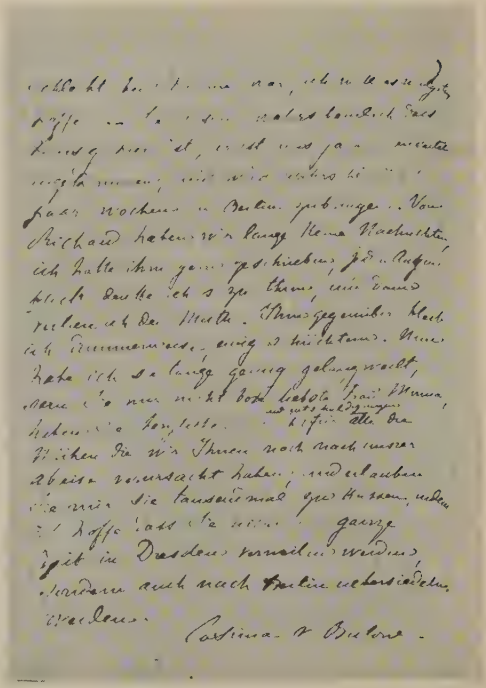
Now let us cast up the accounts and see in what period his great work was done, whether it was in the later days, when the glitter of production, made possible by the bounty of the King of Bavaria, enhanced Wagner's greatness, or in the earlier days when he was creating works that he thought might never be put on the stage. Was it true that the possibility of production stimulated his talent? On the evidence, we must say *no*. *All* his works were conceived before Bayreuth was thought of. On the contrary, absorption with the details of production may have prevented him from conceiving anything new.

We will now divide Wagner's productivity

Charles Lavell Photo

MINNA AND NATALIE, FROM AN UNPUBLISHED PHOTOGRAPH IN THE BURRELL COLLECTION





Charles Lavell Photo

1891 1859

SHOWING HOW COSIMA'S HANDWRITING CHANGED FROM 1859 TO 1891 AND APPROACHED THAT OF RICHARD WAGNER

into periods. We are concerned with eleven operas—*Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Tristan and Isolde*, *Parsifal*, and the four *Ring* operas —*Rhinegold*, the *Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*. We are concerned also with four periods—the Minna period, from 1836 to 1861, twenty-five years; the period of wandering, from 1861 to 1864 when Ludwig came to the rescue, three years; the period of Cosima's partial influence, 1864 to 1870, when she succeeded in marrying him, six years; finally, the period of Cosima's complete influence, from her marriage until his death in 1883, thirteen years, or, with the six already counted, nineteen years of more or less power over the composer.

In the twenty-five years he spent with Minna, Wagner's record was as follows: Eleven operas conceived, the poems for nine of them finished, the music for seven of them completed and half of an eighth composed, and four of them produced. In the three-year period of indecision, no operas were conceived, one poem was written and part of the music of one opera. During the six years of Cosima's partial influence, no operas were conceived, no poems were written, the opera left unfinished from the

Minna period was completed, part of the music for one other worked out, and four operas were produced. Finally, in the thirteen years of married life with Cosima, no operas were conceived, one poem was written, one opera was finished and one composed, and three operas were produced.

It would be labouring the point to work out percentages to show the differences in Wagner's rate of work under Minna's influence and under Cosima's. In the entire nineteen years of Cosima's two periods of influence, he produced nothing new; his entire output was the putting down on paper of the poem of one opera already planned, the composition of the music for two operas already existing in his mind, and the completion of a third, begun some years ago. The rest of that glittering period was concerned with the production of works already composed—which would inevitably have found their way to the stage whichever wife he were with.

How much more brilliant is the record of that quarter of a century with Minna—a new opera conceived almost every other year! An opera completed every third year! If Wagner had produced musical compositions during his

life with Cosima at the same rate as he did during his life with Minna, we should be richer now by six operas! That is the achievement of Cosima—not the gift of the only two operas she dared claim, although they were conceived under the influence of her rival, but the loss of the half-dozen works that Wagner might have written, and did not.

This is the most important result of Wagner's relations with his two wives. That he was in many ways an unpleasant character, that he used women for his own ends, that his first wife suffered to such an extent that she cried in a letter to a friend, after the final desertion: "If these twenty-five years could be erased from my life, I would be happy!"—all this does not matter in the face of his music. Geniuses do not live by ordinary codes, and they must not be judged by them. But what *does* matter is that the woman who enjoyed the fruits of Wagner's success should not be allowed to succeed in her attempt to set up again those ordinary standards; reduce to them the figure of a man whose real stature towers high above them; provide, after falsifying his story, an apology which makes of him only a feeble example of the bourgeois virtues that he hated—all this in

order to oust from her rightful position at his side that other woman who suffered from living too close to the hot flame of genius.

Wagner was one of the world's greatest musicians—perhaps the greatest of all. It is absurd to give to any woman or to any other person credit for the brilliance of his work. No person lives in a mental vacuum, and his work was, of course, affected by those about him. But primarily it was the work of Richard Wagner alone. Minna and Cosima were drawn in accidentally, contributed their help or hindrance, but there would have been others if they had not existed. The one important person in the combinations was the artist himself; the others were only accessories.

When we understand this, when we stop talking as though someone other than Wagner composed his works (and that is an assumption which no one has held to more tenaciously than the Wahnfried group) then we shall realize to which of the many women in his life the admirers of the great artist that Wagner was should look as truly representing his mate. It is indisputably that woman who suffered most at his hands, who remained most faithful to him through the storms of his passions, who

loved him most truly all her life long, and who was so loved by him that her lonely death shamed him into a self-excusing that has left a black stain on his memory.

The true wife of Richard Wagner was Minna.

A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

THIS bibliography makes no pretension to completeness. It is intended for the average reader who may have read little (or nothing at all) about Wagner before the present book. If his curiosity is aroused, if he desires to know more about a most remarkable character, or if he wishes to consult the source books for himself to be sure that the authors have not overstated the iniquities of Wahnfried, he will no doubt find as much information as he desires in the books listed below.

FROM WAGNER'S OWN WRITINGS

"My Life," by Richard Wagner, Constable & Co., London, 1911; Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1911. Two volumes. This is Wagner's famous autobiography, so often quoted in the preceding pages. Those who read German fluently may prefer to read the original edition, published the same year by F. Brückmann in Munich.

"Letters of Richard Wagner," selected and edited by Wilhelm Altmann, J. M. Dent & Sons, London, 1927; E. P. Dutton & Co., New York,

1927. Two volumes. Translated by M. M. Bozman from "Richard Wagner's Briefe nach Zeitfolge und Inhalt," Breitkopf, Leipzig, 1905. This collection will suffice for most readers. It contains the important sections of letters selected from the various published collections, and while not complete covers with a fair degree of comprehensiveness Wagner's entire life.

For readers who wish to delve further into the minutiae of Wagner's correspondence, the following volumes may be of interest. They are arranged in what the authors presume would be the descending order of interest for a reader of this book; one may thus stop at any point where satiation makes itself felt, with the comforting assurance that he has probably not missed anything more important than what he has already read. All of the following collections were supposed to be as complete as Wahnfried could make them. All are translations and can be read in the original, though it is recommended that only good German scholars look up the German in preference to the English editions. Wagner's at times exalted German is apt to become rather involved, though he is much easier to read in his letters than in some of his prose works.

"Richard to Minna Wagner," translated by William Ashton Ellis, H. Grevel & Co., London, 1902; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1909. Two volumes. Mr. Ellis' preface is an interesting example of the Wahnfried view of Minna.

"Family Letters of Richard Wagner," translated by William Ashton Ellis, Macmillan & Co., London, 1911; Macmillan Company, New York, 1911. These 124 letters are written to Wagner's mother, sisters, and other close relations and thus give us some very intimate glimpses of the man.

"Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck," translated by William Ashton Ellis, H. Grevel & Co., London, 1905; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911. Mr. Ellis' preface and "Valedictory" are again excellent examples of Wahnfried's malice.

"Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt," translated by Francis Hueffer, and revised by William Ashton Ellis, H. Grevel & Co., London, 1897; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1897. Two volumes. Both sides of the correspondence are given.

"The Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondence," edited by Elizabeth Foerster-Nietzsche. Translated by Caroline V. Kerr, with an introduction by H. L. Mencken. Duckworth & Co., London, 1922; Boni & Liveright, New York, 1921.

"Richard Wagner's Letters to His Dresden Friends," Theodor Uhlig, Wilhelm Fischer and Ferdinand Heine, translated by J. S. Shedlock, H.

Grevel & Co., London, 1890; Scribner & Welford, New York, 1890.

"Richard Wagner's Letters to August Roeckel," translated by Eleanor C. Sellar, with an introductory essay by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, J. W. Arrowsmith, Bristol.

"Letters of Richard Wagner to Emil Heckel," with a brief history of the Bayreuth festivals; translated by William Ashton Ellis, Grant Richards, London, 1899; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

BIOGRAPHIES

"Life of Richard Wagner": the authorized English version by William Ashton Ellis of C. F. Glasenapp's "Das Leben Richard Wagner," Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London, 1900-1908. Six volumes. This is the authorized biography of Wagner, going into the most minute detail, but thus pointing all the more heavily the many important omissions, such as that of the Laussot affair, noted in the present book. Mr. Ellis began the work as a translation of the Glasenapp biography, but he took increasingly greater liberties with it until at the appearance of the fourth volume Glasenapp's name disappeared from the title page.

"Wagner as Man and Artist," by Ernest Newman (Second Edition), John Lane, The Bodley Head, London, 1924; Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.,

1924. Certainly the best biography in English, covering not only Wagner's life but his writings and musical works also. The reader who wishes to confine himself to a single biography of Wagner will do well to choose this one.

"Richard Wagner, a Critical Biography," by George Ainslie Hight, Arrowsmith, London, 1925. Two volumes. An interesting biography, unprejudiced, occasionally accepting Wahnfried's statements, occasionally rejecting them.

"Richard Wagner as He Lived," by William Wallace, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., J. Curwen & Sons, London, 1925; Harper & Brothers, New York, 1925. In the Masters of Music series, edited by Sir Landon Ronald. A light and interesting popular biography.

"Liszt, Wagner and the Princess," by William Wallace, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., J. Curwen & Sons, London, 1927; E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1927. A most amusing glimpse of some of the more fantastic aspects of the relations between Wagner and Liszt.

IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The endeavor has been to provide this bibliography primarily for the use of English readers. The authors would like, however, to indicate to their readers two books likely to prove

of great interest to them which have not yet been translated into English. They are:

"Cosima Wagner—Ein Lebens—und Charakterbild," von Richard Graf du Moulin-Eckart, Drei Masken Verlag, München-Berlin, 1929. The first complete biography of Cosima Wagner, written from the standpoint of utter adulation. The preface, in which she is hailed as the greatest woman of her time, gives excellent if unconscious witness to the stultifying influence Cosima exerted on those about her.

"Richard Wagner und Die Frauen," von Julius Kapp, Schuster und Loeffler, Berlin, 1912. An excellent work on Wagner's relations with women, containing a number of letters still unpublished in English. Kapp came very close to exposing Wahnfried on the basis of his own work. Readers who are not familiar with German, but who know French, will find it in that language as:

"Richard Wagner et Les Femmes," par Julius Kapp, Perrin & Cie., Paris, 1914. The translation is good, but contains one serious error, the attribution of Frau von Herwegh's characterization of Wagner to that worthy as a description of her.

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